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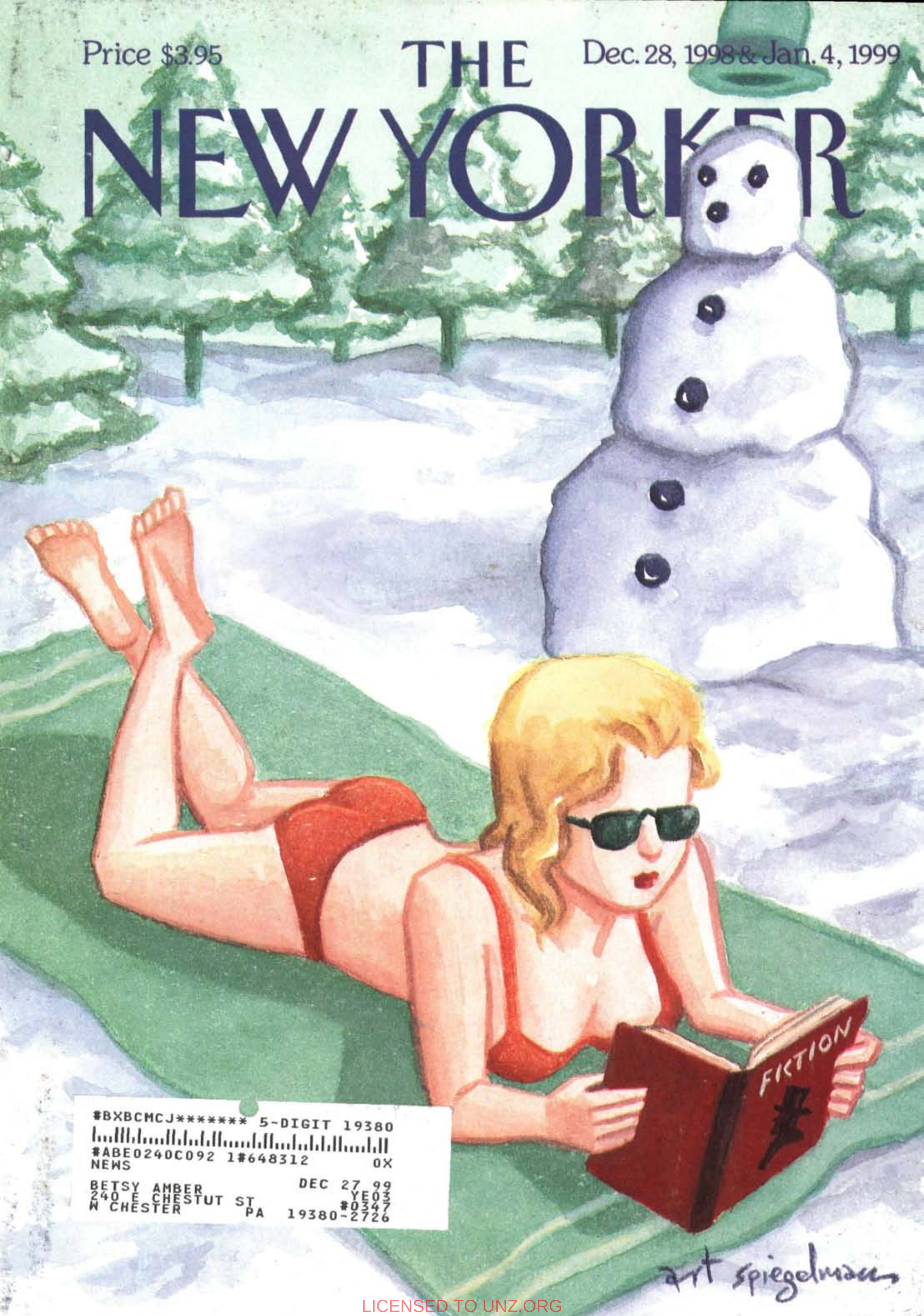
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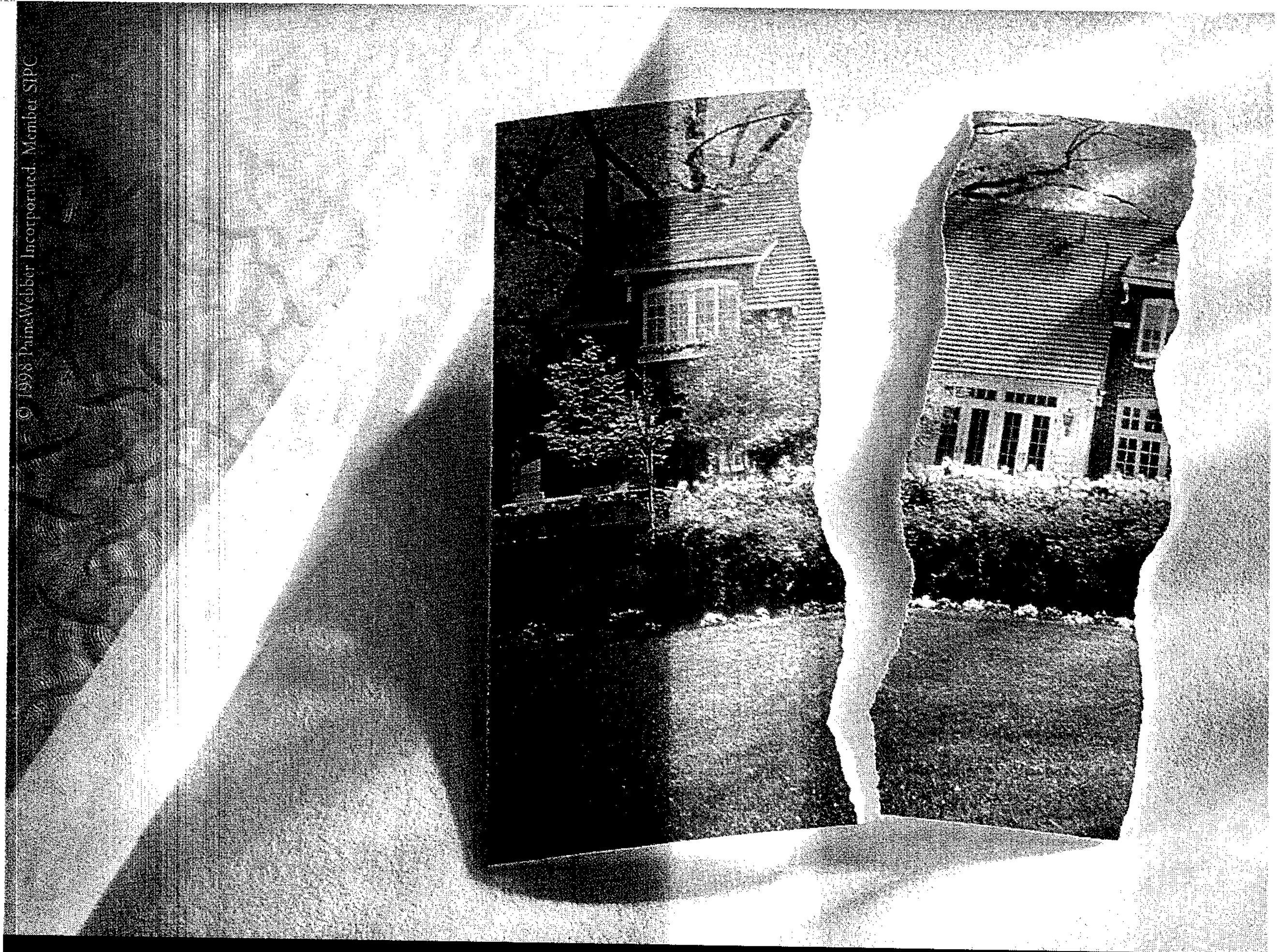

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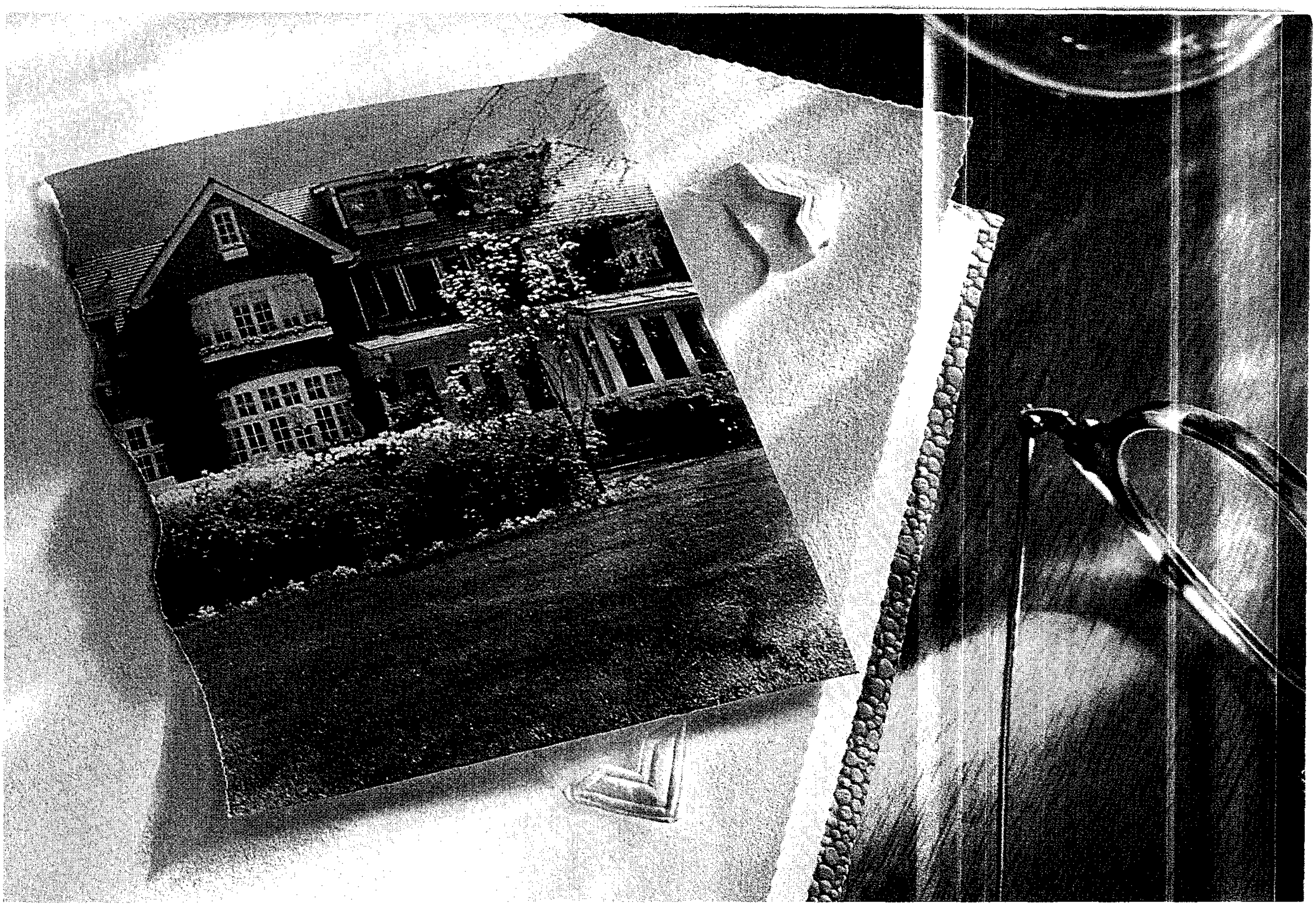

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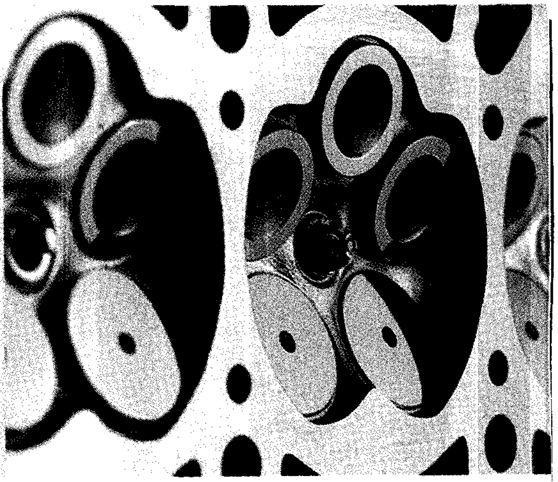

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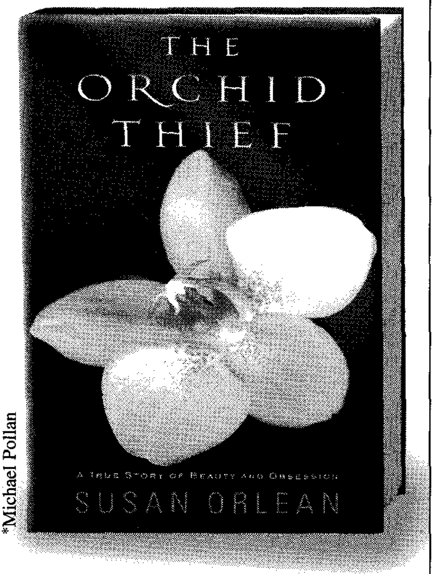

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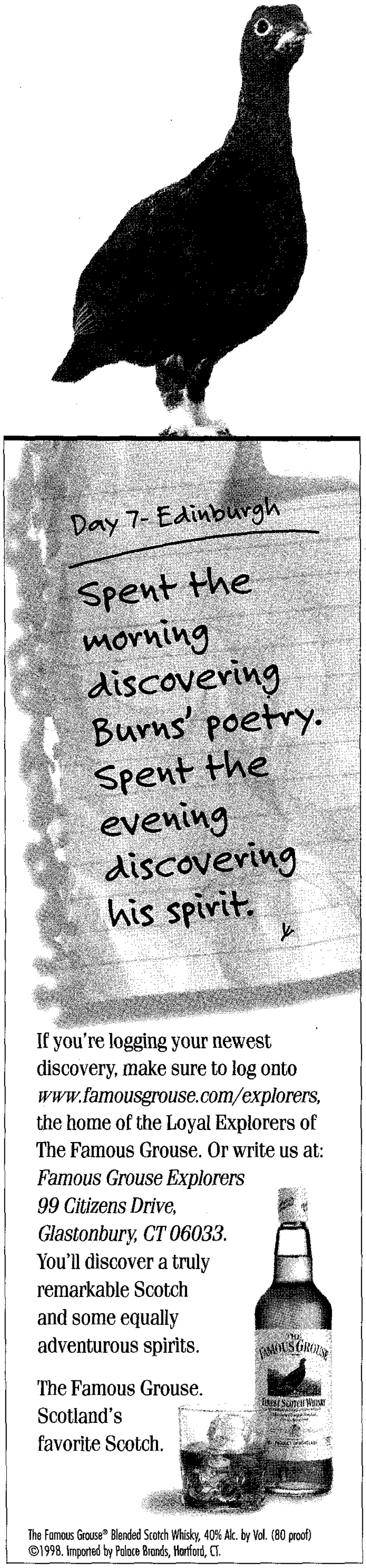
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CONTRIBUTORS

ETHAN COEN (Winter Tale, p. 130) is a filmmaker, whose first book—"Gates of Eden," a collection of stories—was published in November.

WILLIAM MAXWELL (Winter Tale, p. 110) was a *New Yorker* editor for forty years. He has written six novels, including "So Long, See You Tomorrow," three collections of stories, and a book of essays.

FINTAN O'TOOLE ("The Many Stories of Billy the Kid," p. 86) is the author of "A Traitor's Kiss: The Life of Richard Brinsley Sheridan, 1751-1816."

VLADIMIR NABOKOV (Critic at Large, p. 124) contributed to *The New Yorker* from 1942 to 1976. A new edition of "Speak, Memory," much of which first appeared in the magazine, will be published in April.

RICHARD FORD ("Crèche," p. 72) is a novelist and short-story writer. His most recent collection is "Women with Men."

JHUMPA LAHIRI ("Sexy," p. 100) has just completed her first book, a collection of stories, "Interpreter of Maladies," which will be published in the spring.

GEORGE W. S. TROW ("Folding the Times," p. 48) first contributed to *The New Yorker* in 1966. His new book is "My Pilgrim's Progress," a memoir.

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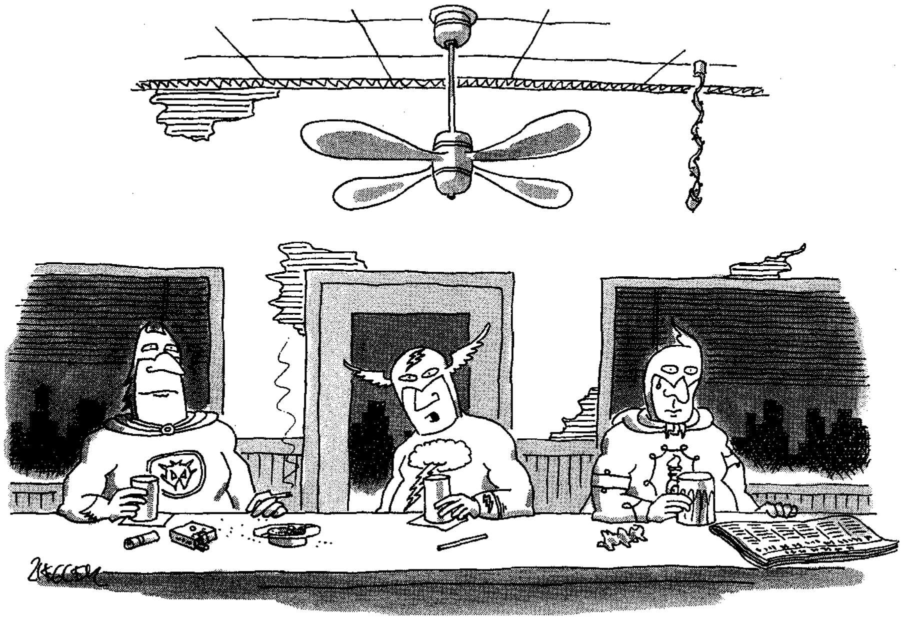
GEORGE SAUNDERS ("Sea Oak," p. 112) teaches creative writing at Syracuse University and is the author of "CivilWarLand in Bad Decline." ◆



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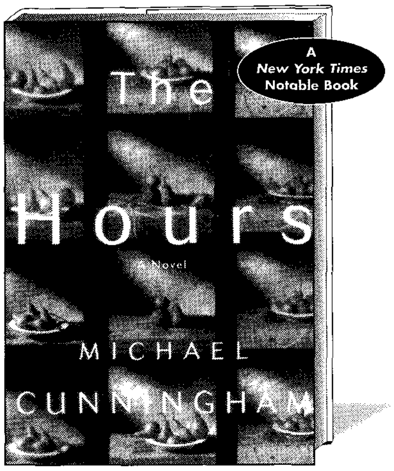
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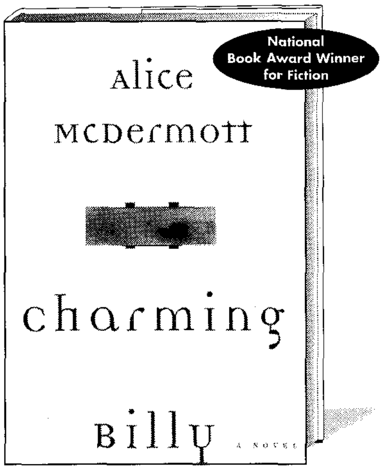
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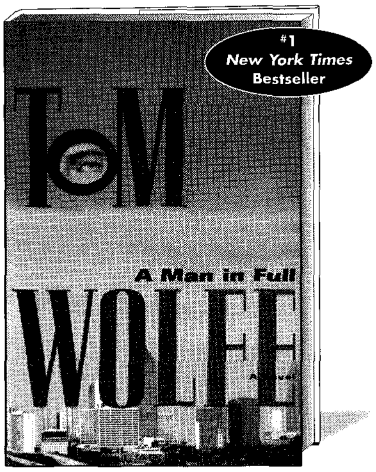
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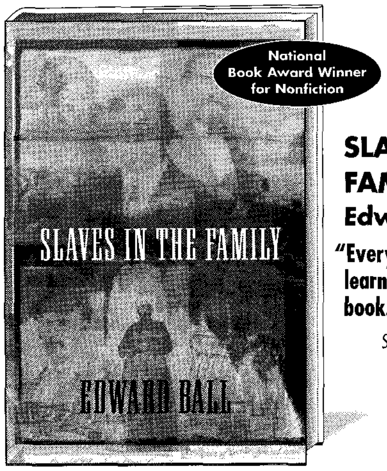
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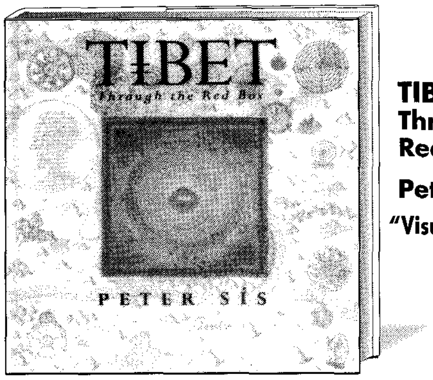
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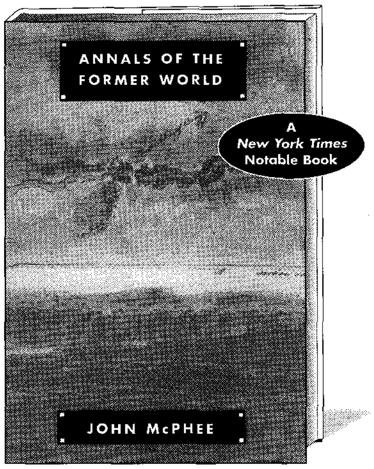
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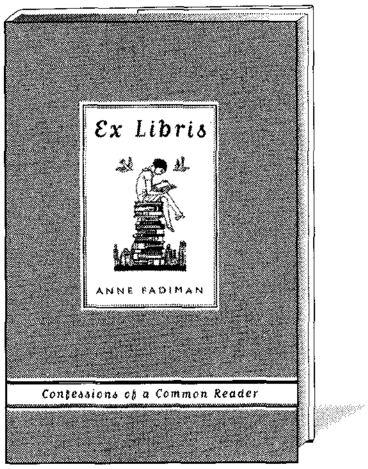
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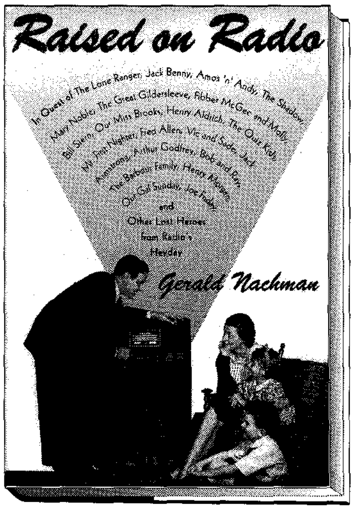
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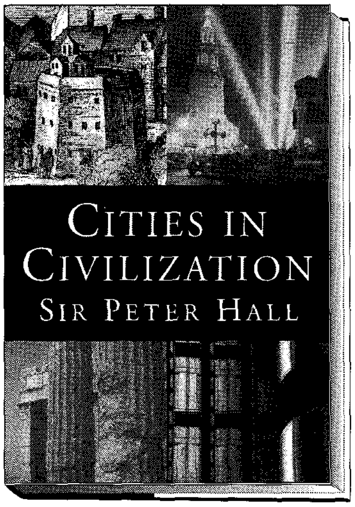

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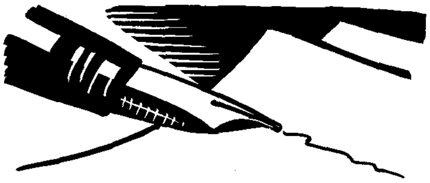

EXHIBITING FREUD

In "Freud Rising" (November 9th) Daphne Merkin claimed that I was "delighted" by the Library of Congress's postponement of its current Freud exhibit and that I declared at the time of the postponement that the motive behind the show was propagandistic. My comment, however, was made earlier, to characterize the initial intentions of the show's deviser, Dr. Harold Blum, who had announced that the show would be a timely response to "Freud denigration." By placing my statement in the context of the postponement, the article made it seem an expression of joy over a turn of events that had actually appalled me, because I knew that postponing the show would redouble the Freud establishment's cries of "censorship" against petitioners who had simply called for objectivity. In addition, the mistiming furthered the impression repeatedly propagated by the curator, Michael Roth, that I was expressing contempt for Mr. Roth's own eclectic plans, which were in fact unknown to me at the time I made my statement.

FREDERICK CREWS
Berkeley, Calif.

NICKELS AND DIMES

Adam Gopnik's article about the new American bills ("Metamoney," November 9th) reminded me of a discovery I made some years ago after returning from six months in London: one coin is both the most American of all coinage and, perhaps, the most hostile to foreigners—the dime. If you inspect a dime, you will notice that nowhere on it do the words "ten cents" appear. None of our coins have any numerals on them, but a nickel, for instance, does include the helpful "five cents"—if you happen to read English. The dime, though, so American in its weightlessness, so nearly invisible, is a mystery to outsiders, a triumph for Americans.

REYNA EISENSTARK
Brooklyn, N.Y.

UNDERSTANDING AUSCHWITZ

David Denby, in his review of "Life Is Beautiful" (The Current Cinema, November 16th), has it only half right when he says, "You don't create a world inside a concentration camp; it creates a world inside you." The fact is that in Auschwitz, in other camps, and in ghettos Jews *did* create their own worlds: they wrote poetry, studied Torah, and even organized lectures on art and health care. They did these things to survive. As a Holocaust survivor, I had assumed that I would find the film, a comic fable set in Auschwitz, to be a trivialization, but I was wrong; the director, Roberto Benigni, uses comedy in a very careful and instructive way, and enhances rather than diminishes the reality. By focussing on the fantasy a father sustains to protect his son's innocence, Benigni emphasizes the significance of their efforts to cope. It's through his comedic ingenuity that Benigni has made an important contribution to our understanding of the lessons of the Holocaust.

ABRAHAM H. FOXMAN
National Director, Anti-Defamation League
New York City

THE JOY OF LITERATURE

In his critique of Tom Wolfe's "A Man in Full" (Books, November 9th) John Updike follows a long discussion of the novel's strengths with the edict that it "still amounts to entertainment, not literature." He complains that Wolfe's scenes are "a little thick for floating suspense and characters with free will." According to these criteria, Dickens and Tolstoy haven't written literature either. "A Man in Full" clearly isn't Updike's *kind* of literature, but perhaps he will someday discover that different literary styles—like different sexual positions—can be means to the same end.

JAMES TUCKER III
Minneapolis, Minn.

•

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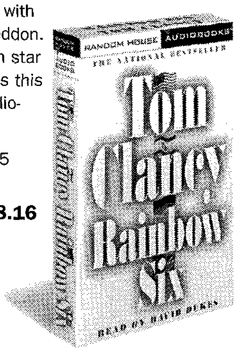
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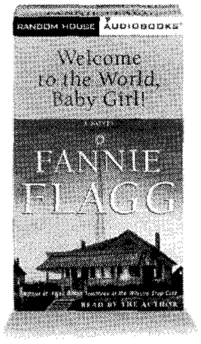
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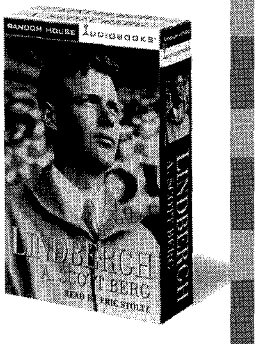
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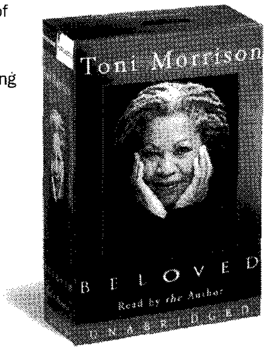
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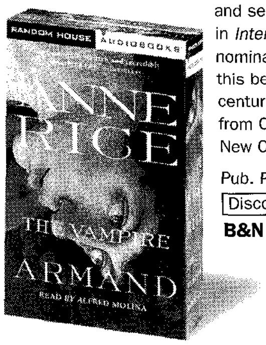
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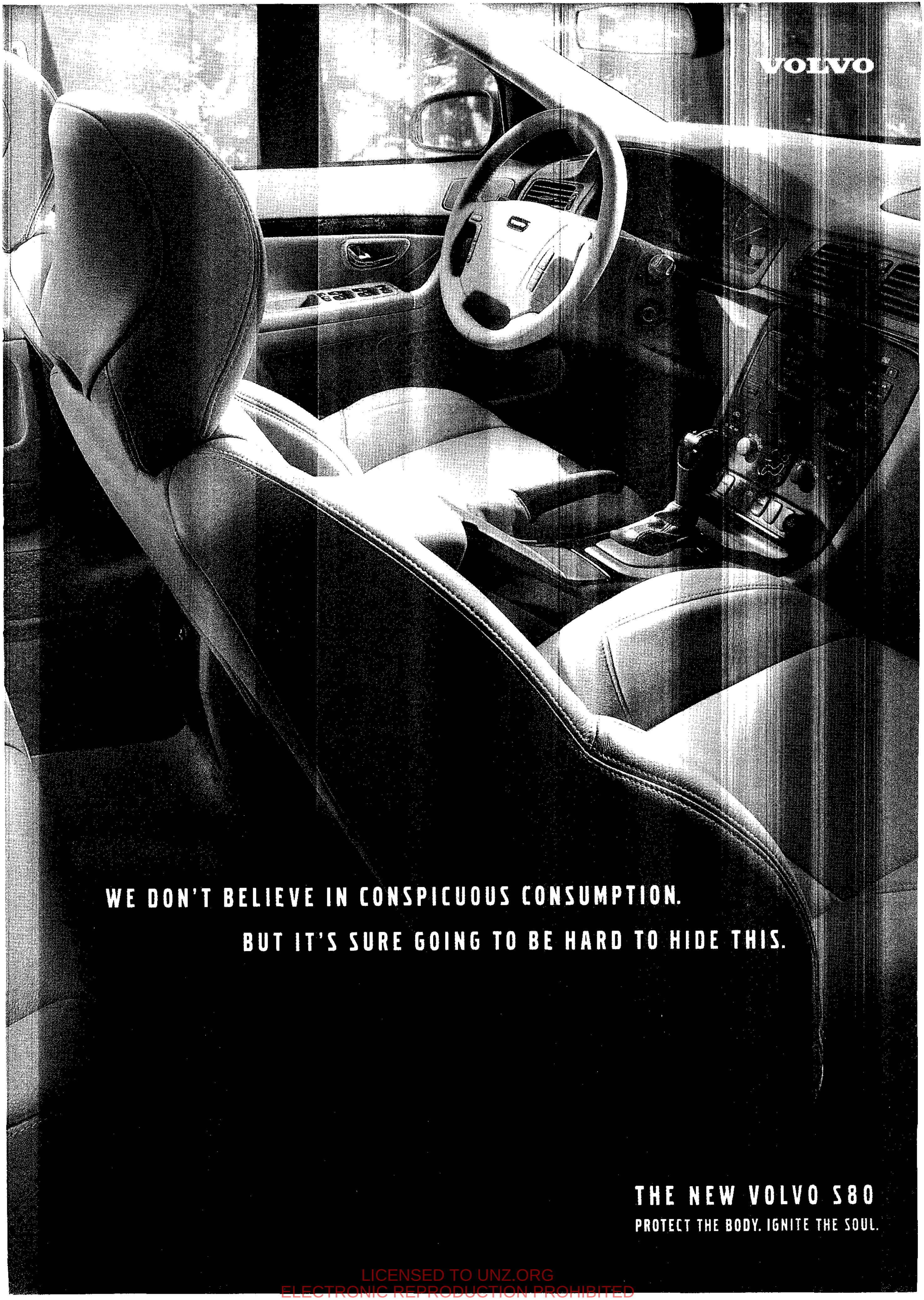
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THE THEATRE

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

(Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.)

The Captain's Tiger—A theatrical memoir, set on a steamer bound for Asian ports, by the South African playwright Athol Fugard, who leads the cast. In previews. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

The Country Wife—The Pearl Theatre Company's production of Wycherley's Restoration comedy. In previews through Jan. 3. Opens Jan. 4 at 7. (80 St. Marks Pl. 598-9802.)

A Couple of Blaguards—Shay Duffin and Mickey Kelly perform Frank and Malachy McCourt's two-man autobiographical show. In previews. (Triad, 158 W. 72nd St. 799-4599.)

An Evening with Quentin Crisp—The author, actor, and wit celebrates his ninetieth year, with a return engagement of his one-man show. Opens Dec. 25 (Mr. Crisp's birthday) at 8 and continues through Jan. 31. (INTAR, 420 W. 42nd St. 330-7200.)

Far East—An American military officer (Michael Hayden) is caught in a triangle involving his commander's wife, in a drama by A. R. Gurney, set during the Korean War. In previews. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

Fosse—A tribute to the choreographer's work, created by Richard Maltby, Jr. (director), Ann Reinking (co-director/co-choreographer), and Chet Walker (choreography re-creator). Previews begin Dec. 26. (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

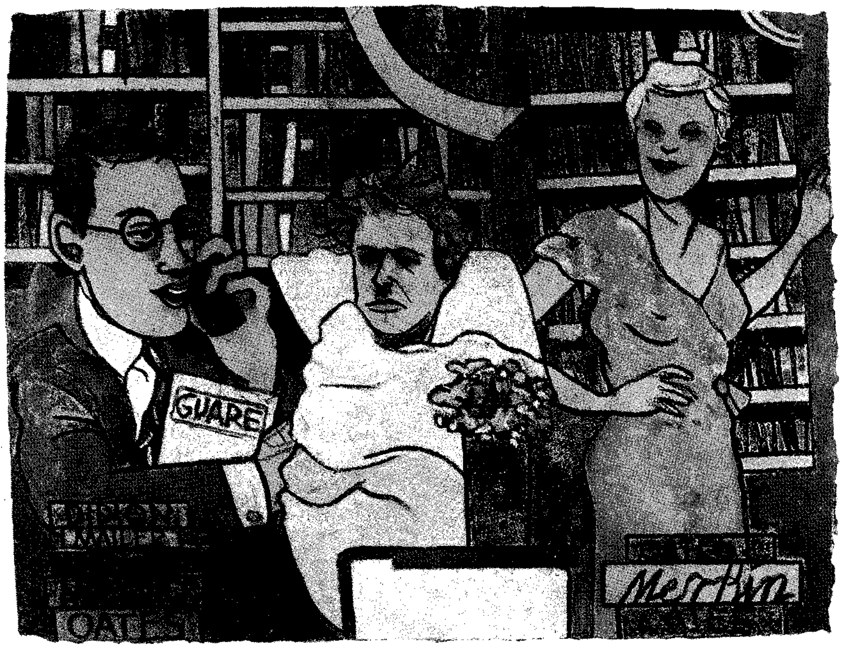
Paradise Hotel—A new mind bender from the director and writer Richard Foreman, about a group of travellers searching for sexual nirvana. Previews begin Jan. 2. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 533-4650.)

Some Voices—The British playwright Joe Penhall's comedy-drama about a restaurant owner who takes in his schizophrenic brother, presented by the New Group. In previews. (St. Clement's, 423 W. 46th St. 279-4200.)

OPENED RECENTLY

All Under Heaven—Valerie Harper portrays Pearl Buck in a drama about the author's life, co-written by Ms. Harper and Dyke Garrison. (Century Theatre, 111 W. 15th St. 239-6200. Closes Jan. 17.)

August Snow and **Night Dance**—Repertory stagings of two plays—one set in 1937, the other in 1945—about a North Carolina family, by the novelist Reynolds Price. (Mint, 311 W. 43rd St. 315-0231. Closes Jan. 10.)



David Aaron Baker, Mary Louise Wilson, and Katie Finneran, in "Bosoms and Neglect."

The Blue Room—Nicole Kidman and Iain Glen portray five characters each in David Hare's adaptation of Schnitzler's "La Ronde," a series of linked seduction scenes. Directed by Sam Mendes. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

Bosoms and Neglect—The Signature Theatre Company's John Guare season continues with this 1979 black comedy. The playwright's strange titles often seem reasonable once you've seen the shows, and this one is no exception: a man's blind mother is having surgery for breast cancer; meanwhile, he's getting to know one of his psychiatrist's other patients. The more the characters reveal about themselves, the more mayhem follows, but, as directed by Nicholas Martin, this production flawlessly combines Guare's love of wordplay and humor with his quest to figure out how we connect to each other, and what connecting might mean. The cast—Mary Louise Wilson, David Aaron Baker, and Katie Finneran—creates such real characters that no matter how outlandish the comedy gets the audience is always aware of the high stakes. The wrenching final monologue feels inevitable, and inevitably true. (555 W. 42nd St. 244-7529. Closes Jan. 10.)

Collected Stories—Despite a splendid performance by Uta Hagen, as an aging writer who tells her protégée the one story about her own life which she hasn't written, this revival of Donald Margulies's 1997 drama only points out how poorly constructed the relationship between the two women is. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 239-6200.)

Communicating Doors—A wonderful farce with a fairy-tale ending, by Alan Ayckbourn. (Variety Arts, Third Ave. at 13th St. 239-6200. Closes Jan. 3.)

Duet! A Romantic Fable—The Adobe Theatre Company's amiable spoof of all things fifties, from lounge acts to monster movies to overwrought dream sequences. The cast is charming, and the direction is not overwhelming—a big step in the right direction for Adobe. (Actors' Playhouse, 100 Seventh Ave. S. 239-6200.)

Electra—Zoë Wanamaker has the title role in a Donmar Warehouse/McCarter Theatre production of Sophocles' tragedy. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200. Closes Jan. 17.)

The Flying Karamazov Brothers—The troupe of juggling musicians returns to Manhattan with its latest show, "Sharps, Flats & Accidentals." (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5050. Closes Jan. 3.)

Fool Moon—Clowning and music with Bill Irwin, David Shiner, and the Red Clay Ramblers, who return to Broadway for a limited engagement of their 1993 show. (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 307-4100. Closes Jan. 1.)

Footloose—A musical adaptation of the 1984 film, co-written by Dean Pitchford (who also wrote the screenplay) and Walter Bobbie. With music by Tom Snow and lyrics by Mr. Pitchford. (Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 307-4100.)

Freedomland—Amy Freed's new comedy, about a dysfunctional family, stars Veanne Cox as an artist who paints hobo clowns. Howard Shalwitz is the director. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 279-4200.)

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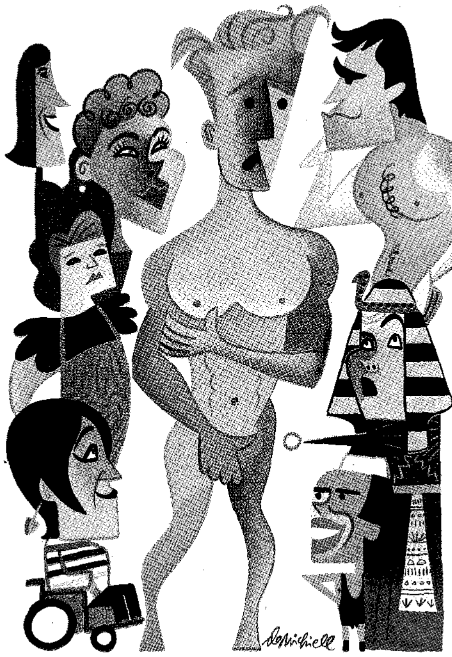
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Impossible Marriage—Beth Henley's new drama, set in Savannah, about a young woman's marriage to a philandering older man. Stephen Wadsworth is the director. (Laura Pels, Broadway at 45th St. 719-1300. Closes Jan. 1.)

I'm Still Here . . . Damn It!—If you're not ambivalent about Sandra Bernhard's new show, you may have missed the point: she's spent her career keeping us guessing about her motives and sincerity, and it's still interestingly hard to tell where the commentary on celebrity narcissism ends and the narcissistic celebrity begins. What stands out in this show, Bernhard's first on Broadway, is her mastery of the emotional hairpin turns in her material—a tender moment can become a hilarious monster-diva moment in seconds—and her terrific, strong singing voice. What more can you ask for? (11/16/98) (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)


Alan Tudyk, in "The Most Fabulous Story Ever Told," by Paul Rudnick.

Killer Joe—In Tracy Letts's graphic dark comedy, an American family striving for a better life—in this case, a bunch of losers living in a trailer outside Dallas—hires a hit man to help things along. Though the experience sometimes feels like being trapped in Sam Shepard's claustrophobic Nowheresville while being smacked around by Quentin Tarantino, the terrific production is so vividly unself-conscious that you hardly feel assaulted at all—in fact, you enjoy it. Scott Glenn and Amanda Plummer are billed as the stars, but the whole cast is excellent. Wilson Milam is the director. (SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 239-6200.)

Little Me—Martin Short carries this musical-comedy relic on his cute little shoulders with ease. But the show—a spoof of celebrity rags-to-riches stories, which originally starred Sid Caesar, in 1962, in multiple roles—*is* a relic, so audience members not madly in love with Short (who are these people?) may find themselves scratching their heads, wondering how the innocent/ribald silliness ever inspired more than minor laughs. The rest of the cast is pretty much generic, with the exception of the wonderful Faith Prince, and unfortunately she's miscast. Written by Neil Simon (book), Cy Coleman (music), and Carolyn Leigh (lyrics). Direction and choreography are by Rob Marshall. (Roundabout, Broadway at 45th St. 719-1300.)

Mercy—In Laura Cahill's Off Broadway début, a quartet of Upper West Side twentysomethings ask one another such Big Questions as "Are you scared of the millennium?" and "Am I boring?" Lots of head bobbing and hyperbolic, oh-my-God dialogue ensues, as a day of waxing pseudo-philosophical amid Crate & Barrel coziness turns into an impromptu dinner party. (Think "Friends," but more earnest.) In the end, though, these answer-seeking characters—and the production—are touching in their graceless attempts to connect. We've all been there before. (Vineyard Theatre, 108 E. 15th St. 353-3874. Closes Jan. 3.)

The Most Fabulous Story Ever Told—A fresh version of a very old tale, by Paul Rudnick. Joanna Adler, Lisa Kron, Amy Sedaris, and Alan Tudyk are in the cast. Directed by Christopher Ashley. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 460-5475. Closes Jan. 10.)

The Mystery of Irma Vep—It's not difficult to imagine what made this farce a hit back in 1984: the play's author and original star, the immensely gifted Charles Ludlam, who died in 1987 of complications due to AIDS. As staged and performed by that production's co-star, Everett Quinton, this version ends up a bore, despite its fairly outré conceit—"Rebecca" meets Agatha Christie meets pure camp. Drag has been out of the closet for a long time now; this is an artifact of a more innocent time. (Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.)

The Old Settler—Leslie Uggams and Godfrey L. Simmons, Jr., portray a pair of mismatched lovers in 1943 Harlem. The play, written by John Henry Redwood, has fine characterizations and delightful jokes, but the structure is predictably melodramatic. Nevertheless, the whole cast (which includes Lynda Gravátt and Rosalyn Coleman), under the strong direction of Harold Scott, overcomes it all. (Primary Stages, 354 W. 45th St. 333-4052.)

On the Town—This revival of the 1944 musical, much like the very city it celebrates in its famous opening number, is a mixture of undeniably irritating qualities and tremendous satisfactions, of mystifying chaos and disciplined vitality. The director, George C. Wolfe, jettisoned Jerome Robbins's original choreography in favor of new work that doesn't add anything; it's as if he tore down the Empire State Building and replaced it with . . . nothing. Still, this production is handsome and winning, and it features two performances that make you glad to be alive—one from Lea DeLaria, who plays a brassy bulldozer of a taxi-driver with Mermanesque confidence, skill, and charm, and one from Mary Testa, whose hilariously dignified portrayal of a dipsomaniac singing teacher is in the tradition of the great matronly comic character actresses of the thirties and forties. The cast in general is uneven, but the spirit of the show is very much alive in Wolfe's hands, and its pulse, fifty-four years later, still beats strong. (12/7 & 12/14/98) (Gershwin, 51st St. west of Broadway. 307-4100.)

Over the River and Through the Woods—In Joe DiPietro's new comedy, a young man planning his future clashes with his four Italian-American grandparents. (John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

Parade—The story of Leo Frank, a Northerner wrongly convicted of murdering a child in the South in 1913, is the basis of a musical by Alfred Uhry (book) and Jason Robert Brown (music and lyrics). Directed by Harold Prince. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

Peter Pan—Kathy Rigby may not be as enchanting as Mary Martin was in the title role, but how many ten-year-olds care? To kids, this well-worn but highly satisfying staging has all the elements of great theatre that it needs—Indians, pirates, a fairy, a crocodile, magic dust—and if you can find a more daring flier than Rigby, it's your patriotic duty to notify the United States Air Force. Paul Schoeffler is especially fun as Captain Hook. (Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 307-4100. Closes Jan. 3.)

Sakina's Restaurant—Aasif Mandvi plays six characters in his one-man exploration of the South Asian community in New York. (American Place, 111 W. 46th St. 239-6200.)

The Shaughraun—The nineteenth-century playwright Dion Boucicault's melodrama, staged by the Irish Repertory Theatre. (132 W. 22nd St. 727-2737. Closes Jan. 24.)

Side Man—Warren Leight's astute, elegiac play is a young man's bittersweet homage to his crazy, warring parents and to the mysteries of the jazz life that divided them. The father (played by Frank Wood with superb passive-aggressive vacancy), a big-band trumpet player, speaks articulately in his art but is a kind of zombie at home, which bewilders his son (a charming, laid-back Christian Slater) and drives his wife (Wendy Makkena) to drink. The son serves as a biographer of sorts, whose combined detachment from and involvement in the family is mirrored by the director Michael Mayer's expert staging, as he moves in and out of remembered scenes, alternately commenting on and participating in their chaos. (11/23/98) (Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

Spread Eagle—Brian Murray portrays an acclaimed British actor who leaves the stage for a life in Mexico, in a dark comedy by Jim Luigs. (WPA Theatre, 519 W. 23rd St. 206-0523. Closes Jan. 1.)

Stop Kiss—Diana Son's modern tragicomedy, about two heretofore heterosexual young women (Jessica Hecht and Sandra Oh) falling in love in New York, is a small wonder. The fine production shifts back and forth seamlessly between scenes that lead up to the friends' first kiss and scenes that follow it, in the aftermath of a brutal, bias-inspired assault. It's a sweet dream and a nightmare at once, a juxtaposition that makes both sides of life seem more resonant. Ms. Hecht stands out in the first-rate cast. Jo Bonney directed. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 260-2400. Closes Jan. 10.)

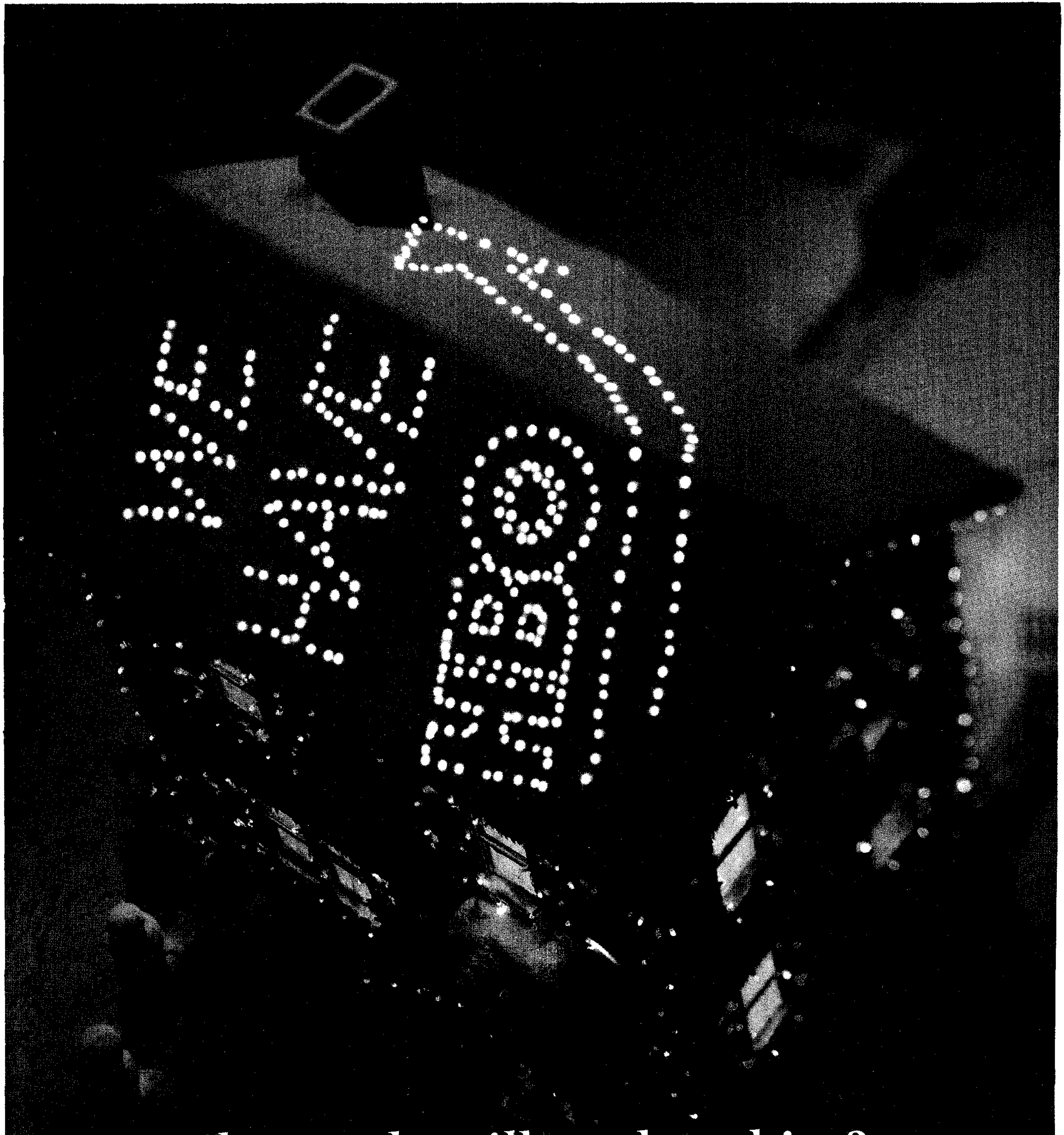
Swan Lake—The British choreographer Matthew Bourne's thrilling, iconoclastic version of the Tchaikovsky ballet takes the story of the troubled Prince who falls in love with a swan out of the realm of the folkloric and into the realm of Freudian nightmare, where obsession substitutes for enchantment. The simple but profound exchange of male for female swans sweeps away in one stroke the hidebound froufrou of the traditional version and releases enormous energy into the music. (10/19/98) (Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 307-4100. Closes Jan. 23.)

Symphonie Fantastique—Abstract puppets underwater, set to the music of Berlioz. A peerless, delightful evening. (HERE, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 647-0202.)

This Is Our Youth—Kenneth Lonergan's highly praised comedy about postadolescent heartbreak, set on the Upper West Side in 1982. His characters are meant to be the by-products of a morally bankrupt culture: they have money, they have a certain raggedy charm, and they can muster a kind of vocabulary. What they don't have in life is a reason to be; what they don't have onstage is a way of compelling our attention. Lonergan, whose script shows real theatrical promise, is good on surface behavior but not on subtext. Everything that is psychologically important happens offstage. Mark Brokaw is the director. (11/23/98) (Second Stage, Broadway at 76th St. 787-3392. Closes Jan. 3.)

Wit—Margaret Edson's funny, diamond-sharp first play manages to yoke together Donne's "Holy Sonnets" and ovarian cancer to make an original drama about the dignity of the spirit and the failure of modern medicine. Kathleen Chalfant, as the feisty English professor with only two hours to live and so many acid jokes to tell, gives one helluva fine performance. (Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 307-4100.)

ROBERT DEMICHIELL



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DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET—"The Nutcracker" continues through prime toy season: Dec. 23 at 2 and 6, Dec. 26 and Jan. 2 at 2 and 8, Dec. 27 and Jan. 3 at 1 and 5, Dec. 28-30 at 6, and Dec. 31 at 7. . . . ¶ On Jan. 5 at 8, the company returns to repertory works with the opening program ("Monumentum Pro Gesualdo/Movements for Piano and Orchestra," "Stravinsky Violin Concerto," and "Symphony in Three Movements") in a weeklong series celebrating Balanchine's black-and-white ballets. (New York State Theatre. 870-5570.)

ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATRE—Dec. 23 at 8: "Bad Blood," "Vespers," and "Episodes." . . . ¶ Dec. 24 at 8: "Hymn," "Lettres d'Amour," and "Revelations." . . . ¶ Dec. 25 at 8: "The Prodigal Prince," "Lettres d'Amour," and "Revelations." . . . ¶ Dec. 26 at 2: "Hymn," "Restricted," "Ascension," and "Revelations." . . . ¶ Dec. 26 at 8: "Memoria," "Vespers," and "Slaves." . . . ¶ Dec. 27 at 3: "Polish Pieces," "The Time Before . . . ," "Lettres d'Amour," and "Revelations." . . . ¶ Dec. 27 at 7:30: "Bad Blood," "Vespers," and "Episodes." . . . ¶ Dec. 29 at 8: "Suite Otis," "Polish Pieces," "The Time Before . . . ," and "The Prodigal Prince." . . . ¶ Dec. 30 at 8: "Lettres d'Amour," "Echo: Far from Home," and "Revelations." . . . ¶ Dec. 31 at 8: A medley of Ailey classics. . . . ¶ Jan. 2 at 2: "Streams," "The Time Before . . . ," "Revelations," and "Lettres d'Amour." . . . ¶ Jan. 2 at 8: "Echo: Far from Home," "Restricted," and "Ascension." . . . ¶ Jan. 3 at 3: "The Prodigal Prince," "Lettres d'Amour," and "Revelations." (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

Alvin Ailey's Briana Reed, as the Goddess in "The Prodigal Prince," at City Center.

N ASCENCIOS

"THE HARLEM NUTCRACKER"—In the choreographer Donald Byrd's version, set to Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn's arrangement of the Tchaikovsky score, Clara is a widow who dreams of the heyday of Club Sweets, during the Harlem Renaissance. (Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100. Dec. 22, Dec. 25, and Dec. 29-Jan. 1 at 8; Dec. 23, Dec. 26, and Jan. 2 at 2 and 8; and Dec. 27 and Jan. 3 at 2 and 7.)

ELIOT FELD'S BALLET TECH—The company presents two programs, one of family fare ("Papillon" and "Simon Sez") and the other of repertory works ("Contra Pose," "Cherokee Rose," "Yo, Johann," and "Paper Tiger"). (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. Dec. 23 and Dec. 29-30 at 2 and 6, Dec. 26-27 and Jan. 2 at 2 and 8, Dec. 31 at 8, and Jan. 3 at 2.)

NEW YORK THEATRE BALLET—Uncle Drosselmeyer explains the intricacies of "The Nutcracker" directly to the young audience, who mingle with the dancers in this hour-long version of the holiday classic. (Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. 355-6160. Dec. 26-27 at 1 and 3:30.)

NIGHT LIFE

CONCERTS

AEROSMITH—Back in the early nineties, when these good old boys from Boston signed a seven-figure record deal, everyone sniggered. Thanks to the endless fealty of MTV and first dibs on a series of high-profile soundtracks, the band has made its third act vastly more profitable than its first. We can expect swivel-hipped, balloon-lipped singer Steven Tyler to swagger on forever. (Continental Airlines Arena, the Meadowlands. 212-307-7171. Dec. 27 at 8.)

G. LOVE & SPECIAL SAUCE—This funky trio called its latest CD "Yeah, It's That Easy," but, despite a charismatic singer and a silky groove, the band has had a surprisingly difficult time moving beyond cult stardom—a good thing for its fans. With its back-porch heat and chicken-shack style, G. Love & Special Sauce is a flavor best kept to oneself. (Roxy, 518 W. 18th St. 307-7171. Dec. 29 at 9.)

PHISH—Vermont's favorite laid-back combo. (Madison Square Garden. 307-7171. Dec. 28-30 at 7:30 and Dec. 31 at 8.)

CULTURE CLUB—Once, Boy George was a pleasant enough singer with a harmless take on blue-eyed soul. If he appears here in full schmatte regalia, it will be worth the price of admission. (Radio City Music Hall, Sixth Ave. at 50th St. 247-4777. Dec. 31 at 10.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

(A highly arbitrary listing, in which boldface type indicates some of the more notable performers in town. Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.)

BIRDLAND, 315 W. 44th St. (581-3080)—Dec. 24-26: If only trumpeter **WALLACE RONEY'S** ideas matched his formidable technique. Never give up, though, on a player who through the years has been invited to share the stage with both Miles Davis and Ornette Coleman. Dec. 29: The **GIL EVANS** orchestra. Dining.

BLUE NOTE, 131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Through Dec. 27: Expect pianist **CHICK COREA** to make a good showing with his newest band, Origin. A fully stocked, all-acoustic ensemble, Origin features Corea's spirited playing and tangy originals; band members include bassist **AVISHAI COHEN,** drummer **JEFF BALLARD,** saxophonists **STEVE WILSON** and **BOB SHEPPARD,** and trombonist **STEVE DAVIS.** Dec. 29-Jan 3: **ROBERTA FLACK.** Jan. 4-6: **THE MANHATTAN TRANSFER.** Dining.

CARLYLE HOTEL, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wraparound pastel murals, and, through New Year's Eve, the inimitable **BOBBY SHORT.** Starting Jan. 2, **EARTHA KITT** takes over. . . . ¶ Across the hall, in Bemelmans Bar, **BARBARA CARROLL** is in attendance.

IRIDIUM, 44 W. 63rd St. (582-2121)—Through Dec. 27: Pianist **STEPHEN SCOTT,** whose casual daring and knockabout wit set him apart from the multitude of young, play-it-safe techno-wizards, will have the extravagantly gifted trumpeter **NICHOLAS PAYTON** on hand to add even more brio to the bandstand. Mondays belong to electric-guitar innovator **LES PAUL.** Dining.

JAZZ STANDARD, 116 E. 27th St. (576-2232)—Dec. 22-23 and Dec. 26-27: Is **VALERY PONOMAREV** the greatest hard-bop trumpeter to emerge from Russia or are there other nascent Lee Mor-

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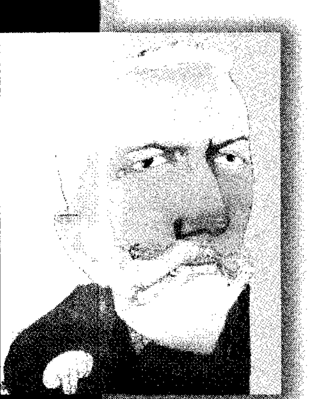

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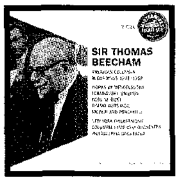

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gans somewhere on the steppes? Only time will tell. He's joined here by drummer JIMMY COBB, the sole surviving member of Miles Davis's "Kind of Blue" recording. Dec. 29-Jan. 3: ANDY BEY, the man who used to sing Horace Silver's love-peace-and-tolerance lyrics back in the seventies, has reinvented himself as an *über*-romantic. Letting ballads soak luxuriously in his plush tenor voice and setting them off with just-right piano chords, Bey sets a deep-blue mood of languor, longing, and loss.

JOE'S PUB, 425 Lafayette St. (539-8770)—Dec. 31: The MINGUS BIG BAND, a fourteen-piece ensemble that concentrates exclusively on the tricky, cacophonous work of its inspiration, the late Charles Mingus.

KNICKERBOCKER, 33 University Pl., at 9th St. (228-8490)—Dec. 30-Jan. 2: Pianist JUDY CARMICHAEL strides like Fats Waller's long-lost daughter, and in saxophonist MIKE HASHIM and guitarist CHRIS FLORY she's got partners who are hooked into her pre-swing groove.

KNITTING FACTORY, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—"Jewsapalooza" continues with more wonderfully warped klezmer and progressive Jewish jazz than you can shake a dreidel at. Dec. 23: PARADOX TRIO and YOSSI PIAMENTA. Dec. 24: HASIDIC NEW WAVE. Dec. 25: METROPOLITAN KLEZMER and KLESMOKUM. Dec. 26: KLESMOKUM. Dec. 27: SHIRIM and NAFTULE'S DREAM.

LENOX LOUNGE, 288 Lenox Ave., between 124th and 125th Sts. (427-0253)—Dec. 25-26: The baritone sax has a good friend in HAMIET BLUIETT, a player who can coax both poetry and animalistic bleats from his big horn.

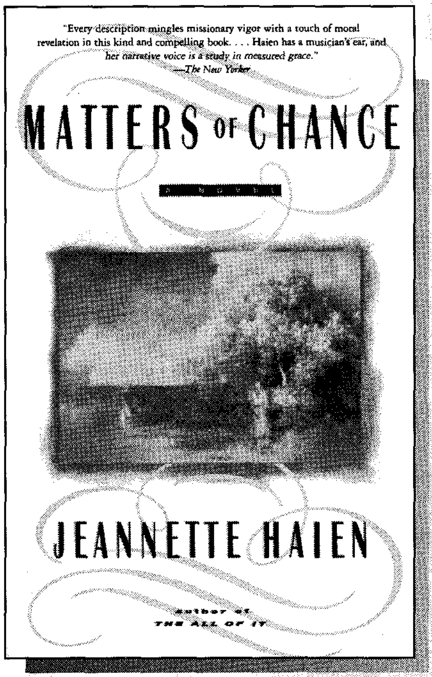
MICHAEL'S PUB, 109 E. 56th St (758-2272)—JULIE WILSON, the doyenne of New York's chanteuses, is in the midst of an open-ended run dedicated to Cy Coleman.

SWEET BASIL, 88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (242-1785)—Through Dec. 27: RAY ANDERSON and his Lapis Lazuli Band. Trombonist Anderson has a match for his soulful outpourings in keyboardist and singer AMINA CLAUDINE MYERS, a sophisticated stylist whose gospel effusiveness colors her every move. Dec. 29-Jan. 3: The ART FARMER quintet. Farmer's work proves that urbanity has its place even in jazz's spontaneous, emotional universe. By picking the perfect notes, placing them exactly where they belong, and burnishing each one with elegance, he turns control and calculation into a style all his own. The only bumptious aspect of Farmer's art is the name of his instrument—the flumpert, a flugelhorn/trumpet hybrid. Dining.

TONIC, 107 Norfolk St. (358-7503)—Dec. 23: CHOCOLATE GENIUS. Dec. 26: BILL WARE and KARL BERGER—making like the Marx and Engels of avant-vibraphone playing—are here to show straitlaced percussionists that they've got nothing to lose but their chains. Dec. 31: MARC RIBOT Y LOS CUBANOS POSTIZOS. Appropriating the arrangements of Arsenio Rodriguez and other pre-Castro bandleaders, Ribot's prosthetic Cubans ring in the New Year.

VILLAGE VANGUARD, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Dec. 23-27: The CEDAR WALTON quartet. Pianist Walton has a touch of Clark Kent, a touch of Superman: beneath his mild-mannered surface is a jazzman of steely power and intelligence. He's also a terrific composer and an exacting bandleader. With a quartet, his renowned improvising ought to gleam. Dec. 29-Jan. 3: DR. MICHAEL WHITE'S ORIGINAL LIBERTY JAZZ BAND OF NEW ORLEANS. Clarinettist and musicologist White is a proud scion of New Orleans who lives to celebrate the riches of jazz's first golden era. His exuberant renditions of classics by Armstrong, Bechet, King Oliver, and other Big Easy icons are sure to bring Southern sunshine to our wintry shores. The VANGUARD JAZZ ORCHESTRA holds sway on Mondays.

ZINNO, 126 W. 13th St. (924-5182)—Dec. 30-31 and Jan. 2: This eating-and-listening establishment has been a home away from home for the underrated pianist JUNIOR MANCE for quite some time—he deserves to headline the big night of the year. Each time out, Mance brings the bebop-and-beyond authenticity of five decades of experience to the keyboard.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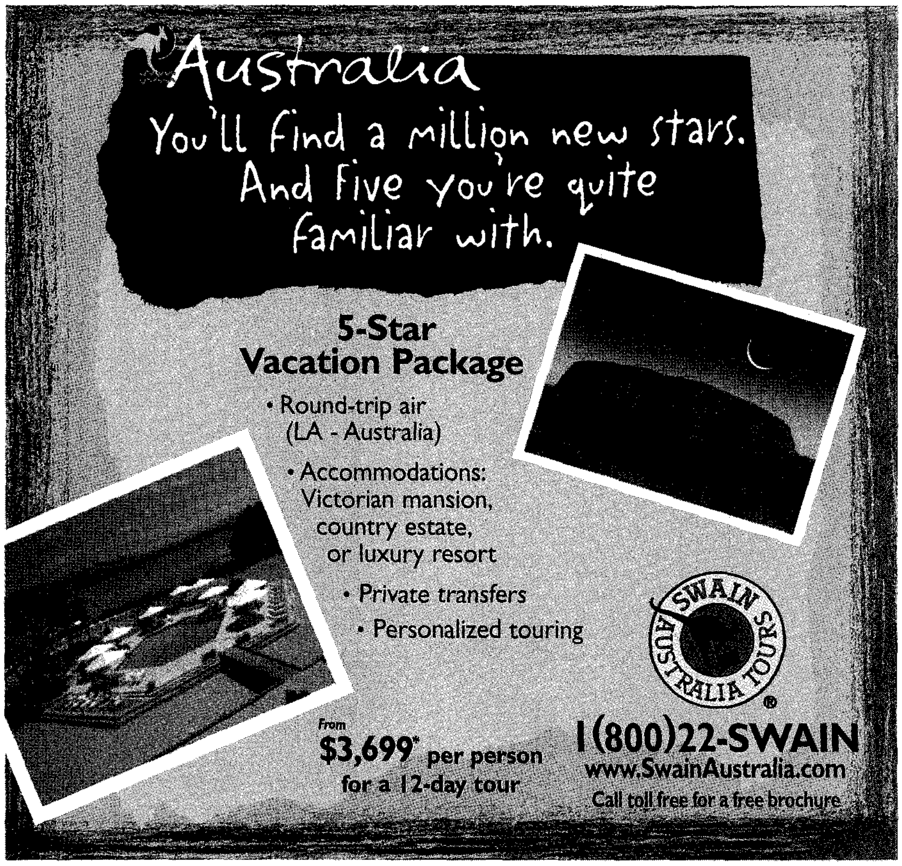

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ROCK, ETC.

Bottom Line, 15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—Dec. 26: An evening with Woodstock veteran (and sometime jingle singer) **RICHIE HAVENS.** Dec. 31-Jan. 2: Discovered and promoted by Ani DiFranco, singer-songwriter **DAN BERN** may be one of the more original performers to have infiltrated the pop scene. His sensibility might be best described as Lou Reed raised on "Melrose Place," and his dark, post-folk narratives are as tuneful as they are hysterical. With the clever Canadian pop group **MOXY FRÜVOUS.**

Bowery Ballroom, 6 Delancey St. (533-2111)—Dec. 26-28: The fierce industrial noise of **EINSTURZENDE NEUBAUTEN.** Dec. 30-31: **PATTI SMITH** is back in town for the start of the New Year. The 1996 album "Gone Again" was her first collection in nearly a decade, and it was a bona-fide event, bursting with pain, humor, danger, warmth, spirituality, sensuality, and a reaffirmation of rock and roll's ability to liberate. After a ten-year period that saw the deaths of friends, colleagues, her younger brother, and her husband, that she could turn out such a positive work was remarkable and inspiring. Inevitably, last year's effort, "Peace and Noise," made in just a year, was something of a letdown. Even so, two Patti Smith records in just as many years is definitely worth celebrating.

Chicago B.L.U.E.S., 73 Eighth Ave., at 13th St. (924-9755)—Dec. 25-26: The **HOLMES BROTHERS.** No meteoric rags-to-riches story here: after more than twenty-five years in the business, this impossibly great band finally made its first album in 1989. The Holmes Brothers have it all—blues, soul, gospel, R. & B., and country, along with a poise that lends the mix an authority that younger, looser groups can't touch. Dec. 31: Former Jimi Hendrix drummer **BUDDY MILES** has the stage.

Clementine, 1 Fifth Ave. (253-0003)—Cole Porter never imagined anything quite like Phoebe Légère. Part Tallulah Bankhead, part Traci Lords, she may be the only chanteuse capable of playing "I Get a Kick Out of You" with a leg tucked behind her neck. Over the past few years, Légère's appearances have grown so rare that her previous gigs have become legendary (take, for instance, her extended run at the Ballroom, where she tastefully performed Edith Piaf material clad in a miniskirt with the American flag sewn in the seat). The last time we saw Légère, she'd swapped her ivories-and-accordion-driven cabaret for a program of heavy-duty rock and roll. Though she wore the snug décolletage well, the music didn't fit. Now, like the rest of us, Légère has rediscovered swing, which she plays on Sunday evenings with a zoot-suited three-piece ensemble called Swingalicious. Like all things Légère, this is entertainment chronically unsuitable for the faint of heart. Don't expect a Gap commercial from her anytime soon.

Irving Plaza, 17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—Dec. 26: Occasional Bruce Springsteen crony **SOUTHSIDE JOHNNY** ("We're Having a Party") makes some noise with his Asbury Jukes. **MACEO PARKER** (Dec. 30-31) honed his chops working with James Brown in the sixties and Parliament-Funkadelic in the seventies. In between those earth-shaking gigs, the tenor saxophonist found some funk of his own—namely, Maceo & All the King's Men—which established his impeccable prowess as a bandleader. . . . ¶ The Swing Dance Society gathers here every Sunday. The dancers share a passion for the Lindy Hop, a dance that involves a lot of whirling and the occasional display of underwear. Sets from eight until midnight. For information on the society, call 696-9737.

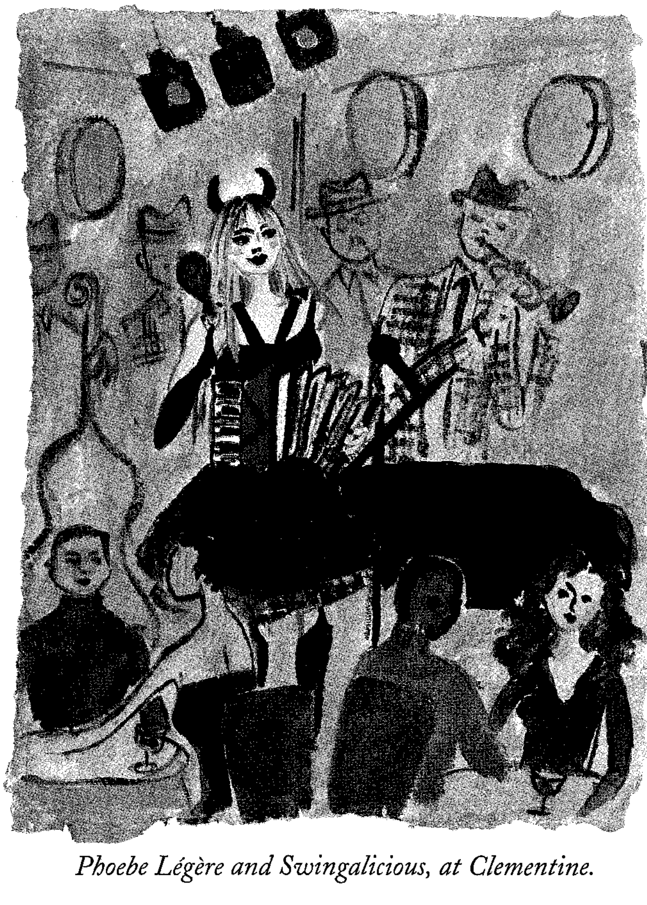
Knitting Factory, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—Dec. 31: **LUNA.** Led by Harvard grad Dean Wareham, who drove Galaxie 500 to college-rock greatness, this New York quartet makes a dreamy kind of music so frankly derivative that it's both disposable and eternal.

Maxwell's, 1039 Washington St., Hoboken (201-798-0406)—Dec. 31: **GUIDED BY VOICES.** A few years back, this Dayton-based combo (whose ringleader, Robert Pollard, picked up his flair for finger painting with words as a fourth-grade teacher) had gone from cult-confection status to near-stardom. But last year Pollard revamped the band, using members of a Cleveland outfit called Cobra Verde for its album "Mag Earwhig!," which resulted in a slightly edgier, though still recognizable, lo-fi sound. Pollard continues to tweak the lineup, so onstage the band may live up to its reputation as one of the few that actually sound better live. Or it may not. Either way, Pollard keeps trying.

Mercury Lounge, 217 E. Houston St. (260-4700)—Dec. 23: Riot-grrrl wannabe **MARY CUTRUFELLO** entertains the troops. Dec. 31: The swampy rock of New York's **BOGMEN.**

S.O.B.'s, 204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (243-4940)—A great grass hut with a fruit-and-bamboo motif, dedicated to calypso, reggae, and the bossa nova. Dec. 26: Master African drummer **BABA OLATUNJI** brings his inspired ten-piece ensemble in for the evening. Dining.

Tramps, 51 W. 21st St. (727-7788)—Dec. 26: Queens hardcore ambassadors **MURPHY'S LAW** crack a few heads. Dec. 28: Rap legend **SLICK RICK.** Dec. 31: **THEY MIGHT BE GIANTS.** It's been more than a decade since John Flansburgh and John Linnell began performing trademark jerky little pop songs full of surreal humor, and their appeal hasn't waned. They welcome the New Year backed by the sterling horn section of trumpeter Jim O'Connor and trombonist Dan Levine.



Phoebe Légère and Swingalicious, at Clementine.

ELIZA GRAN

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

(All the institutions listed will be closed Christmas; some will be closed New Year's Day.)

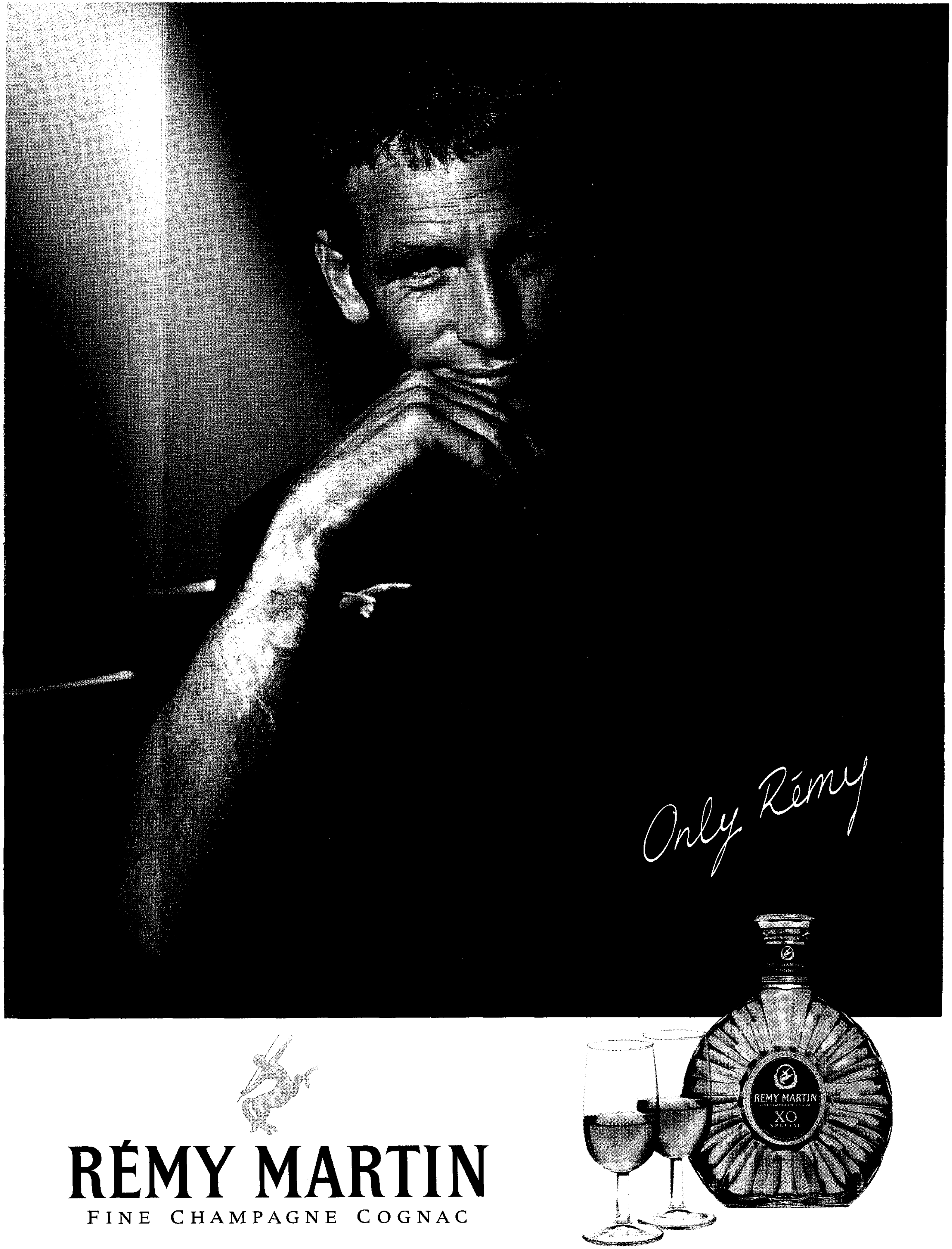
Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—"Anselm Kiefer: Works on Paper, 1969-93." Through March 21. . . . ¶ "Edgar Degas, Photographer." The influence of photography on Impressionist painting has long been established; here Degas seems to be returning the favor, exploiting avant-gardist, painterly effects in the mechanical medium. Through Jan. 3. . . . ¶ "Donato Creti: Melancholy and Perfection" showcases an early-eighteenth-century painter (1671-1749), the last in a line of Bolognese classicists. Through Jan. 31. . . . ¶ "Charles Burchfield from the Collection," a survey of the museum's holdings of this great, eccentric American painter (1893-1967). Through Feb. 28. . . . ¶ "Félix Vallotton: Woodcuts and Three Paintings." Through Feb. 21. . . . ¶ "Mary Cassatt: Drawings and Prints in the Met," a selection of more than fifty works on paper from the museum's collections. Through Jan. 24. . . . ¶ "From Van Eyck to Bruegel: Early Netherlandish Painting in the Metropolitan Museum." Through Jan. 17. . . . ¶ "Cubism and Fashion," at the Costume Institute. Through March 14. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—"Jackson Pollock," a comprehensive retrospective—the first in the United States since 1967—of the artist many regard as the most influential American painter of this century. It would be hard to fault the installation or the choice of works: in addition to many smaller drawings and canvases, the Modern has secured all of the major large pictures, from the mural that Peggy Guggenheim commissioned for her foyer in 1943 to the late "Blue Poles" (1952). Through Feb. 2. . . . ¶ "New Photography: Jeanne Dunning, Olafur Eliasson, Rachel Harrison, Sam Taylor-Wood," the fourteenth installment of the museum's survey series. Through Jan. 12. . . . ¶ "Focus: Pollock and Printmaking." Through Feb. 2. . . . ¶ "Dubuffet to de Kooning: Expressionist Prints from Europe and America." Through Feb. 2. . . . ¶ "Structure and Surface: Contemporary Japanese Textiles." Through Jan. 26. . . . ¶ An exhibition of lamps by Ingo Maurer and furniture by Fernando and Humberto Campana, in the project room. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, and Thursdays, 10:30 to 6; Fridays, 10:30 to 8:30.)

Guggenheim Museum, Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—"Rendezvous: Masterpieces from the Centre Georges Pompidou and the Guggenheim Museums" includes works by Picasso, Matisse, Chagall, Kandinsky, and other modern masters. Through Jan. 24. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 10 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 10 to 8.)

Guggenheim Museum SoHo, 575 Broadway, at Prince St. (423-3500)—"Premises," a spectacular disaster in which two mediocre exhibitions (one of postwar French architecture, the other of postwar French installation and performance art) collide, to the benefit of neither. Through Jan. 10. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Saturday evenings until 8.)

Whitney Museum of American Art, Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—"Duane Hanson (1925-96):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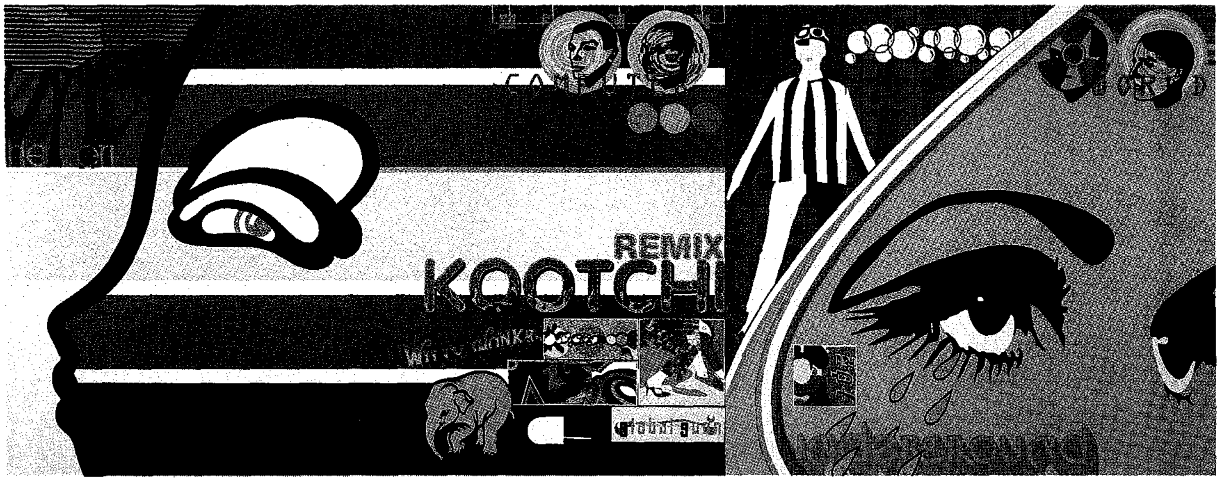


LOGOCENTRIC: *Michael Bevilacqua's acrylic-on-canvas paintings (at Fredericks, 504 W. 22nd St., through Jan. 16) build their bright graphic elements (band logos, racecar decals, designer labels, etc.) into big, busy, CinemaScope attractions. "Split Screen" (above), for example, is a sort of portrait of the artist's wife (a rock critic, symbolized by the tiny inset image of Björk) which is filled with references to the couple's shared milestones: favorite songs and movies, bad hotel experiences, their child's favorite toys, and so on. Has hermeticism ever looked so zesty?*

A Survey of His Work from the Thirties to the Nineties" features more than thirty of the artist's startlingly lifelike sculptures of everyday people. Through Feb. 28. . . . ¶ The first full-scale retrospective of the work of the painter Bob Thompson. Through Jan. 3. . . . ¶ An exhibition of fifty-two Brice Marden drawings. Through March 28. (Open Wednesdays, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6; Thursdays, 1 to 8.)

American Museum of Natural History, Central Park W. at 79th St. (769-5100)—"Butterfly Conservatory: Tropical Butterflies Alive in Winter" offers some four hundred examples of lepidoptera in a specially constructed vivarium. Through Feb. 28. . . . ¶ "Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou." Through Jan. 3. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

Brooklyn Museum of Art, Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—"Royal Persian Paintings: The Qajar Epoch," an exhibition of a hundred large-scale court and religious paintings, manuscripts, and enamels done in the representational style that flourished under the dynasty that ruled Iran from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth century. Through Jan. 24. . . . ¶ "Japonism in Fashion: Japan Dresses the West." Through Feb. 14. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

(Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6. They will all be closed Christmas, and many New Year's Day and other times during the holidays. It is advisable to call ahead.)

Steven Assael—Impressive classical technique deployed in disturbing visions of contemporary urban life. The tour de force, "D," is a dark, apocalyptic oil painting of a subway scene, with a hipster, an African-American family, and a drag queen with stubble, drenched in the golden light of day's end. Many images are grotesque and repellent (a terrifying dominatrix clad in black leather and steel armor, a fat lady clutching a doll), while others, such as an exquisitely finished ink drawing of a midget with deformed feet, are suffused with a melancholy humanism. Through Jan. 9. (Forum, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 355-4545.)

Charles Burchfield (1893-1967)—A strong selection of early watercolors and gouaches by a major American landscape painter too often overlooked. Burchfield had a reverence for nature, finding majesty in the back yards and plowed fields of his native Ohio, which he rendered in a bold, exuberant style that had much in common with Scandinavian Expressionism. Some of the drawings here, such as a desolate scene of a railroad yard, and "Skeletons," a watercolor of a ruined house and a horse hungrily grazing in the snow, reveal a vein of bleak social commentary. Through Dec. 31. (Kennedy, 730 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 541-9600.)

Lucas Samaras—A major exhibition of new work, comprising gold jewelry, self-portraits on X-ray film, pencil drawings, and an enigmatic installation of found bead necklaces. The gold jewelry—heavy cuffs and necklaces designed in chicken wire and cast using the ancient lost-wax process—is deliberately coarse, even barbaric, invoking the legendary splendor of Samaras's native Macedonia; the self-portraits reveal an angry, painfully thin old man, the artist as dispossessed prophet. The juxtapositions create a challenging paradox, bouncing the viewer back and forth from images of the naked body to uselessly luxurious adornments for it. Through Jan. 9. (Pace Wildenstein, 32 E. 57th St. 421-3292.)

Edgar Soberón / Robert Seaver—Ten still-lifes of food and plaster saints, by a Cuban-born painter, executed with more skill than style, posing blunt ambiguities. "Parable," a monumental presentation of loaves and fishes, garnished with garlic, on a tabletop is a blatant tribute to Zurbarán; "Santa Barbara" offers symbols—the saint, a rose, a bowl of fruit—without a key. The effect is immediately intriguing, but it dissipates quickly. / More gustatory enigmas, little Pop-ish still-lifes painted in a cool, opaque style reminiscent of Wayne Thiebaud, displayed in antique frames. In "Plate of Olives," the flat green of the olives vibrates dramatically against the saturated crimson background, but the painting is upstaged by the exquisite marble frame, circa 1830, made from a pair of carved cherry boughs. Through Jan. 9. (Associated American Artists, 20 W. 57th St. 399-5510.)

Andy Warhol (1928-87)—A charming collection of drawings of high heels, cats, flowers, gâteaux, and ladies, from the fifties, before the artist discovered Pop, and a suite of large, loose graphite drawings of nosegays, from 1974. The ink works are all executed in his characteristic broken lines, occasionally enlivened with silver or gold leaf and brilliant tempera, and they're puffs of pure style. In some of them the whimsy cloys, as in a drawing of faux-naïve putti, but none of these works are as innocent as they seem. Through Jan. 16. (Sheehan, 20 W. 57th St. 489-3331. See also Downtown Short List.)

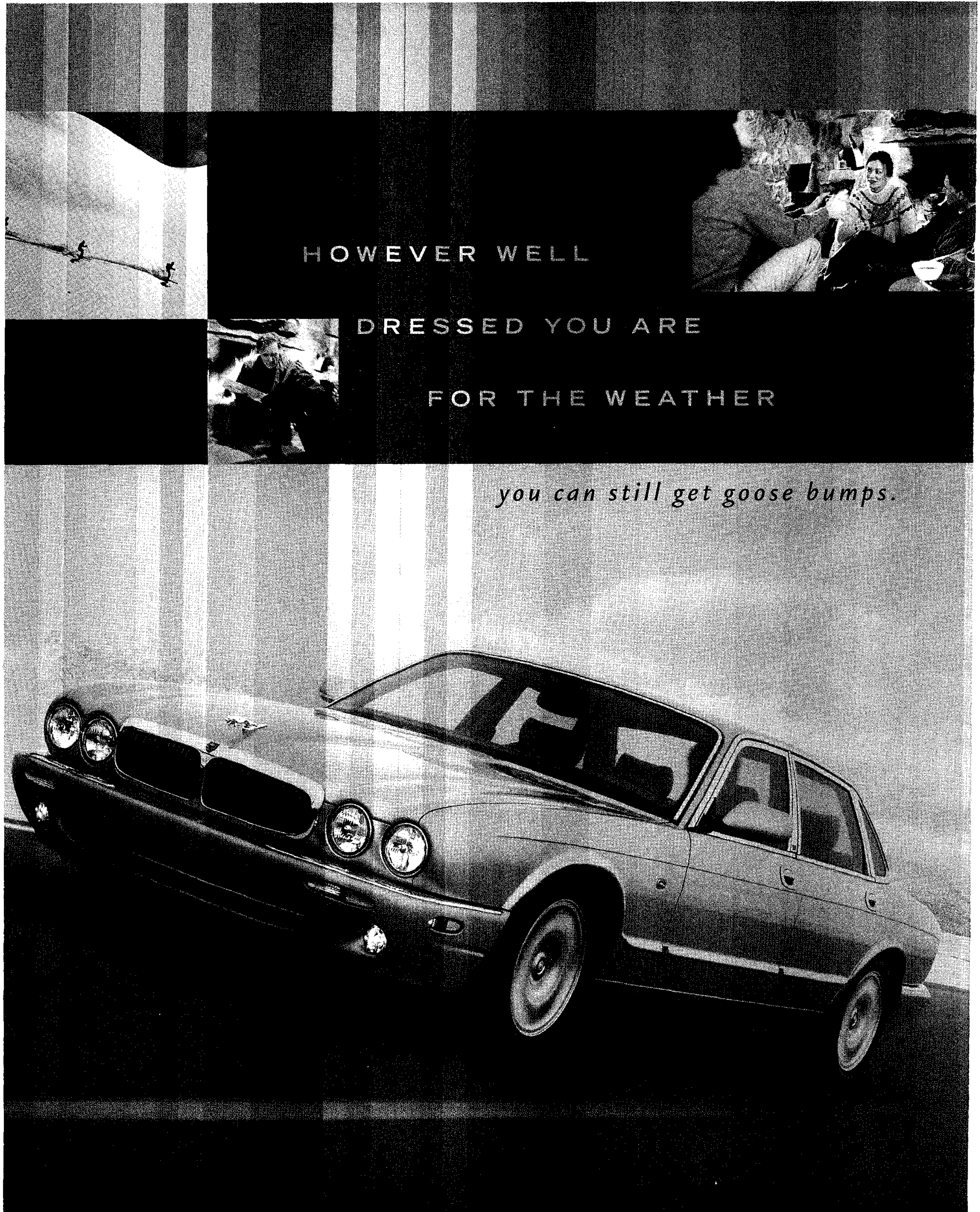
Short List—**JOHN ALEXANDER** and **PATRICK MIMRAN,** Marlborough, 40 W. 57th St. 541-4900. Both shows through Jan. 9. . . . **WALTERCIO CALDAS,** Galerie Lelong, 20 W. 57th St. 315-0470. Through Jan. 16. . . . **WILLIAM DUNLAP,** Hirschl & Adler, 21 E. 70th St. 535-8810. Through Jan. 30. . . . **WES MILLS** and **JULIE ALLEN,** Helman, 20 W. 57th St. 245-2888. Both shows through Jan. 16. . . . **JILL MOSER,** Danese, 41 E. 57th St. 223-2227. Through Dec. 30. . . . **GABRIEL OROZCO,** Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 977-7160. Open Mondays; through Jan. 9. . . . **SIGMAR POLKE,** Werner, 21 E. 67th St. 988-1623. Through Jan. 16. . . . **ENA SWANSEA,** Robert Miller, 41 E. 57th St. 980-5454. Through Jan. 9. . . . **RICHARD TIPPING,** Ubu, 16 E. 78th St. 794-4444. Through Jan. 16.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Doug Aitken—In "Eraser," the larger of the artist's two video installations here, the viewer moves through different rooms, each of which includes multiple video projections of the Soufrière volcano on the island of Montserrat. Aitken continues to refine his penchant for distant, inaccessible landscapes. For all the high-tech resources, his vision, in its quest for the unknown and uninhabited, seems quite romantic. Through Jan. 16. (303 Gallery, 525 W. 22nd St. 255-1121.)

Brenda Zlamany—Southeast Asian landscapes in bright color and soft focus, and wary, golden portraits of artists, among other subjects. The application of paint is rough and sensual, in a style that recalls both AbEx and Old Master hands (neat trick!). For all the unblinking realism of the formal portraits, their air is wistful and not at all harsh—the effect one might expect if the subject of a Lucian Freud portrait broke the solemn reverie and looked fondly at the painter. Through Jan. 2. (Stux, 529 W. 20th St. 352-1600.)

Short List—**FRANCIS BACON, LOUISE BOURGEOIS, AND FRANZ XAVER MESSERSCHMIDT,** Cheim & Read, 521 W. 23rd St. 242-7727. Through Dec. 31. . . . **MICHAEL BEVILACQUA,** Fredericks, 504 W. 22nd St. 633-6555. Through Jan. 16. . . . **ELLEN CANTOR,** XL, 504 W. 22nd St. 462-4111. Through Jan. 16. . . . **VERNE DAWSON,** Gavin Brown's Enterprise, 436 W. 15th St. 627-5258. Through Jan. 16. . . . **VINCENT GALLO,** Nosei, 530 W. 22nd St. 741-8695. Through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Jan. 10. . . . **FELIX GONZALEZ-TORRES,** Rosen, 525 W. 24th St. 627-6000. Through Jan. 16. . . . **TIMUR NOVIKOV** and **JAAN TOOMIK,** I-20, at 529 W. 20th St. 645-1100. Both shows through Jan. 23. . . . **THOMAS SCHEIBITZ,** Bonakdar Jancou, 521 W. 21st St. 414-4144. Through Jan. 9. . . . **GARY SIMMONS,** Metro Pictures, 519 W. 24th St. 206-7100. Through Jan. 16.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

R. M. FISCHER—"Bubble World," an installation of sculptures. Fischer hasn't been a major presence in the art world for some time, and these vaguely anthropomorphic sculptures/lamps are a less than stunning return. They seem uncomfortably close to the art/design tchotchkes sold in the various emporia that have overrun SoHo as the galleries have moved out. But maybe that's the point. Through Jan. 2. (Deitch Projects, 76 Grand St. 343-7300.)

ALFRED JENSEN—A group of paintings by this eccentric artist who began in the prevailing Abstract Expressionist mode but soon developed his own eccentric style. Jensen's work, which favors grids and sequences of numbers rendered in heavy impastos, isn't everyone's cup of tea, although he has never lacked admirers. The purpose of the present exhibition, evidently, is to reintroduce the work in light of recent trends: his interest in systems and information can be regarded as a precursor to that of many of the younger artists now working in a similar style (for instance, Matthew Ritchie and Chan Schatz, who are represented by Basilico). Through Jan. 9. (Basilico Fine Arts, 26 Wooster St. 966-1831.)

JANNIS KOUNELLIS—One of the founding figures of the Italian Arte Povera movement, Kounellis, in his recent shows, has tended toward the lackluster. But within the vast cavern of the Ace gallery, he pulls off a terrific coup de théâtre. Playing off minimalism's fascination with industrial materials, Kounellis often uses very large steel I-beams in the numerous sculptures on display. On the other hand, in keeping with Arte Povera's fascination with natural materials, he resorts to worn burlap sacks and (perhaps in a throwback to an infamous piece that included eleven live horses) several caged starlings. One rather droll sculpture consists of three old armoires suspended from the ceiling. Through Feb. 6. (Ace, 275 Hudson St. 255-5599.)

TABLES FOR TWO

TORAYA, 300 ½ E. 52nd St. (838-4351)—Every weeknight at this vest-pocket spot Isamu Soumi, a fifty-year-old master chef from Japan, composes a menu of six or seven small and exquisite courses, which he then prepares single-handedly in a kitchen the size of a Park Avenue coat closet and which his wife, Mieko, serves to a mostly Japanese clientele.

Based loosely on the Kaiseki style of cooking, which accompanies the Japanese tea ceremony, Mr. Soumi's food exemplifies the refinement of that tradition while doing away with some of the formality (the tableware is humble here, the surroundings modest). Some dishes he prepares with great artfulness: a shimmering egg custard, topped with a single raw clam and laced with slivers of bitter Japanese lemon, reveals, at its center, a single yellow ginkgo nut, like a lucky dime in a child's holiday cupcake; Japanese potatoes carved into ovals the size of almonds float with cabbage-wrapped eel in a sweetly flavored essence that turns out be "broth of lobster brain." Others reflect a Zen austerity inspired by nature, such as a small coil of *uni* (sea urchin), which arrives so fresh that you fear it might inch its way to the opposite side of the plate, where a solitary chestnut, baked with salt and dipped in black sesame seeds, sits serenely. This meditative fare is enhanced by one of the five excellent *ginjo*-level sakes, which come, as do the Soumis themselves, from the high snow country of the Niigata prefecture.

Working alone in the kitchen, Mr. Soumi does without a dishwasher or a food processor but allows himself the luxury of classical music, which he plays nonstop. "My food is a bit like Bach, simple and symmetrical," he tells a diner, with some help from a translator, "but I think maybe Americans are more interested in Beethoven food." He's not concerned with converting the masses, however: he'll serve no more than twenty people a night and won't open on weekends. "I'm a terrible businessman," he confides with a laugh. (Open weekdays for dinner only, with a tatami room available that seats up to twelve. Prix fixe $50-$55. Reservations are strictly required. English does follow Japanese on the answering machine, and Mrs. Soumi will return your call.)

SHORT LIST—**FRANCIS BACON,** Shafrazi, 119 Wooster St. 274-9300. Through Jan. 16. . . . **VIVIAN E. BROWNE,** June Kelly, 591 Broadway. 226-1660. Through Jan. 5. . . . **GEORGE CONDO,** Gering, 476 Broome St. 226-8195. Through Jan. 9. . . . **GREGORY CRANE,** Pelavin, 13 Jay St. 925-9424. Through Dec. 31. . . . **JOSEPH KOSUTH, RICHARD SERRA,** and **KEITH SONNIER,** Castelli, 420 West Broadway. 431-5160. All shows through Jan. 16. . . . **SUZANNE MC CLEL-**

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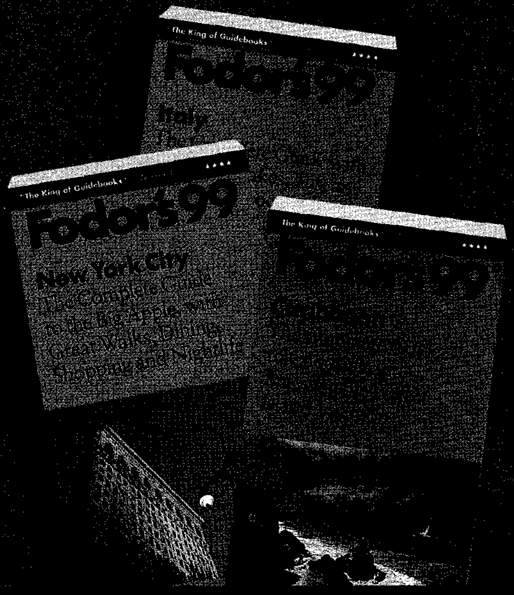

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LAND, Kasmin, 74 Grand St. 219-3219. Through Dec. 31. . . . **MANUEL NERI,** Cowles, 420 West Broadway. 925-3500. Through Jan. 30. . . . **DAVID RABINOWITCH,** Blum, 99 Wooster St. 343-0441. Through Feb. 5. . . . **JULIÃO SARMENTO,** Sean Kelly, 43 Mercer St. 343-2405. Through Jan. 24. . . . **ANDY WARHOL,** Gagosian, 136 Wooster St. 228-2828. Through Jan. 9.

PHOTOGRAPHY

VIRGINIA BEAHAN & LAURA MCPHEE—"No Ordinary Land," a dozen meditative, often mesmerizing color landscapes of places ranging from a burned-out foundation of a home in the Santa Monica Mountains to a verdant tea plantation dotted with flame trees in Sri Lanka. Through Dec. 23. (Laurence Miller, 138 Spring St. 226-1220. . . . ¶ A concurrent show is at Burden, 20 E. 23rd St. 505-5555. Through Feb. 6.)

"CAMERA WORK"—Photogravures from Stieglitz's legendary turn-of-the-century journal by, among others, Steichen, Käsebier, Coburn, and Strand. Through Jan. 7. (Platinum, 551 W. 22nd St. 352-0070.)

"IMAGES OF MILES"—Black-and-white photographs of the trumpeter, by William Gottlieb, Herb Snitzer, Chuck Stewart, and Lee Tanner, among others. Through Jan. 10. (Jazz Gallery, 290 Hudson St., at Spring St. 242-1063. Opens at 1; open Sundays.)

"PIONEERS OF SOVIET PHOTOGRAPHY, 1918-1939"—Works by Alexander Rodchenko, Max Alpert, Georgi Zelma, Dmitri Debanov, and Ivan Shagin. Through Dec. 31. (Schickler, 560 Broadway. 431-6363.)

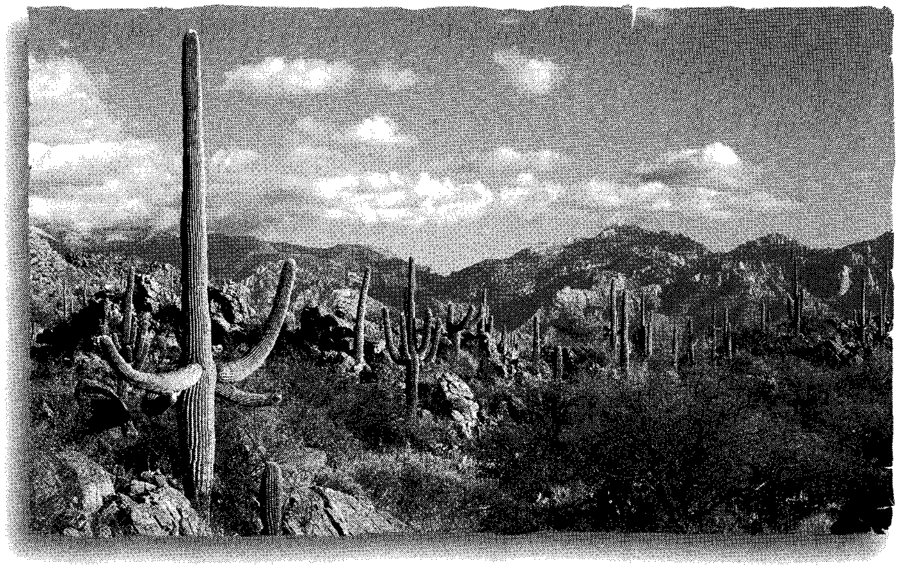
"SKIN/DEEP"—A historical survey of "interior imaging," from X-rays to M.R.I.s, including works by Andrew Bush, Helmut Newton, Vik Muniz, and Annie Leibovitz. Through Jan. 16. (Saul, 560 Broadway. 431-0747.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY—"Bruce Davidson: The Brooklyn Gang, 1959." Through March 7. . . . ¶ "Intimate City: The Photographs of Thomas Roma." Through March 7. (1130 Fifth Ave., at 94th St. 860-1777. Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10 to 5; Fridays, 10 to 8; and Saturdays and Sundays, 10 to 6.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY MIDTOWN—"Man Ray: Photography and Its Double," a large show of works from the artist's archives, which are housed at the Pompidou Center, in Paris. Through Jan. 24. (Sixth Ave. at 43rd St. 860-1777. Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10 to 5; Fridays, 10 to 8; and Saturdays and Sundays, 10 to 6.)

SHORT LIST—**ANSEL ADAMS,** Danziger, 851 Madison Ave., at 70th St. 734-5300. Through Jan. 9. . . . **DICK ARENTZ,** Benrubi, 52 E. 76th St. 517-3766. Through Jan. 16. . . . **LYNN DAVIS,** Houk, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 750-7070. Through Jan. 16. . . . **PHILIP-LORCA DI CORCIA,** Pace Wildenstein, 142 Greene St. 431-9224. Through Jan. 16. . . . **JOHN DUGDALE,** Wessel and O'Connor, 242 W. 26th St. 242-8811. Open Sundays; through Jan. 3. . . . **LYNN GEESAMAN,** Richardson, 560 Broadway. 343-1255. Through Jan. 9. . . . **LARRY GIANETTINO,** Ricco/Maresca, 529 W. 20th St. 627-4819. Through Jan. 16. . . . **JAN GROOVER** and **LEE FRIEDLANDER,** Borden, 560 Broadway. 431-0166. Both shows through Dec. 31. . . . **KENRO IZU,** Greenberg, 120 Wooster St. 334-0010. Through Jan. 23. . . . **GEORGE KRAUSE,** Gallery 292, at 120 Wooster St. 431-0292. Through Jan. 23. . . . **NICHOLAS NIXON,** Zabriskie, 41 E. 57th St. 752-1223. Through Jan. 23. . . . **CHARLES PRATT,** Mann, 42 E. 76th St. 570-1223. Through Jan. 23. . . . **FAZAL SHEIKH,** Pace Wildenstein MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. 759-7999. Through Jan. 16. . . . **ALEX WEBB,** Leica, 670 Broadway. 777-6960. Opens Saturdays at noon; through Jan. 9.

(See the museum listings for photography exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum and the Museum of Modern Art.)



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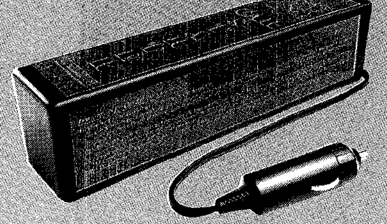

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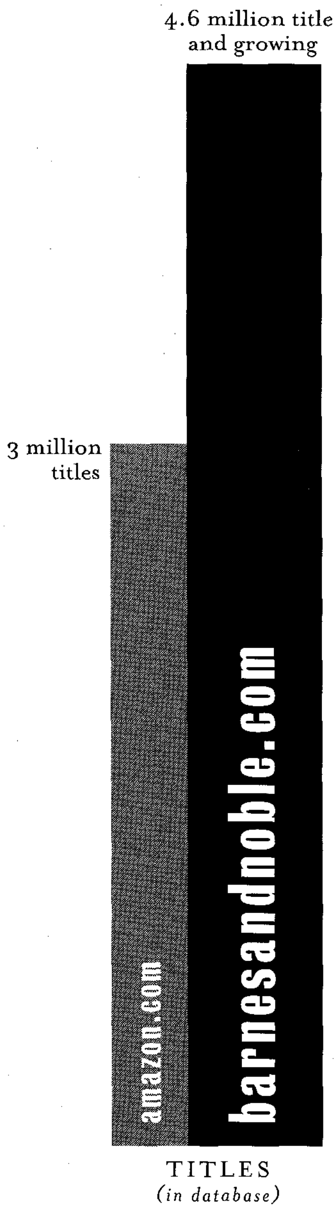

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CLASSICAL MUSIC

(The box-office number for Avery Fisher Hall is 875-5030, and for Carnegie Hall, 247-7800.)

HOLIDAY MUSIC

"Too Hot to Handel"—Concordia Orchestra's annual presentation of Handel's "Messiah," refracted through a prism of jazz, rock, gospel, and rhythm-and-blues styles. Conducted by Marin Alsop, with soloists Lillias White (soprano), Vivian Cherry (mezzo-soprano), Thomas Young (tenor), and the Morgan State University Choir. (Avery Fisher Hall. Dec. 23 at 8.)

Carolling—Everyone is invited to join the N.Y.U. Brass Ensemble to celebrate the conclusion of Christmas shopping. (Washington Square Arch. Dec. 24 at 5. No tickets necessary.)

New York's Ensemble for Early Music—The group, directed by Frederick Renz, marks its twenty-fifth anniversary of offerings at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine with four performances of "A Renaissance Christmas," a wide-ranging program that includes fifteenth- and sixteenth-century carols from England, Spain, Germany, and France, as well as polyphonic Christmas settings by Thomas Ravenscroft, Tomás Luís de Victoria, and others. (St. James Chapel, Cathedral of St. John the Divine, Amsterdam Ave. at 112th St. Dec. 25 at 8, Dec. 26 at 3 and 8, and Dec. 27 at 3. For information about tickets, call 749-6600.)

"Salute to Vienna"—New Year's Day is the occasion for musical celebration in the Austrian capital; for years, its annual "Neujahrskonzert" has been broadcast internationally. Two years ago, in an act of missionary zeal buoyed by the official recommendation of the mayor of Vienna, the tradition landed on American soil, where it has proved very popular indeed. In this performance, Peter Guth, a Viennese conductor whose reputation rests largely on his interpretations of the music of the Strauss dynasty, leads the Orchestra of St. Luke's, soprano Izabela Labuda, and dancers from the New York City Ballet in waltzes, marches, and arias by the Johann Strausses, Jr. and Sr., Franz Lehár, and Robert Stolz. (Avery Fisher Hall. Jan. 1 at 2:30.)

"A Festival of Lessons and Carols"—Music Before 1800 Productions, which is essentially the Choir of Corpus Christi Church (a professional ensemble) plus organist Louise Basbas and violist da gamba Margaret Panofsky, brings in the New Year with a twist: this incarnation of the traditional festival retells the Nativity story through the expected Biblical readings (here rendered by actor Richard Clarke), but intersperses little-known music from Renaissance and Baroque Iberia and Latin America rather than the usual Anglocentric selections. In this performance, Ms. Basbas directs works by, among others, Francisco Guerrero (a Spanish cathedral composer whose literary account of his pilgrimage to Jerusalem is a minor classic of its genre), Pedro Bermudez (who worked principally in Mexico and Peru), and João Rodrigues Esteves (an obscure "Magnificat" by this Portuguese master). (529 W. 121st St. 666-9266. Jan. 3 at 4.)

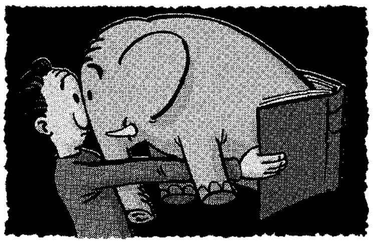
OPERA

Metropolitan Opera—**Die Zauberflöte**, with Dawn Upshaw, Laura Aikin, Paul Groves, Matthias Goerne, and Franz-Josef Selig; conducted by Charles Mackerras. (Dec. 23 and Dec. 29 at 8 and Dec. 26 at 1:30.) . . . With Joyce Guyer, Elizabeth Carter, Mr. Groves, Mark Oswald, and Mr. Selig; Mr. Mackerras. (Jan. 1 at 8.) . . . **Die Fledermaus**, in the opening performances of a new version that features a book and English-language dialogue by Betty Comden and Adolph Green, with Carol Vaness, Elizabeth Norberg-Schulz, Jochen Kowalski, Michael Schade, Bo Skovhus, Earle Patriarco, and the actor Max Wright in the speaking role of

BOOK CURRENTS

Pop Goes the Easel

"When I got to nine drummers drumming, I hit a wall," says the pop-up-book creator Robert Sabuda of his elegant three-dimensional rendition of **The 12 Days of Christmas** (Little Simon). The official term for artists like Sabuda is "paper engineer," and it's true that the work they do is a lot trickier than their fanciful creations suggest. They can also be susceptible to a strain of the disease dreaded by authors of all kinds: pop-up block. Sabuda eventually turned his drummers into mice and set them on top of a bulging snare drum, their tails poised to whip out a beat. His latest effort, **ABC Disney** (Disney Press), is a colorful, flowerlike unfolding of the alphabet—A is for Ariel, B is for Bambi, T is for Tinker Bell, etc.



Aunt Julie, the wacky chaperon in Meg Davenport and Lisa Werenko's **Circus!** (Little Simon), wants to show her niece and nephews a good time under the Big Top, but she winds up getting tangled in the trapeze artists' ropes (their ladders pop up impressively, complete with safety net and bleachers) and then stepping in for Rocketman, the human cannonball. In Chuck Murphy's elaborately constructed **Jack and the Beanstalk** (Little Simon), the stalk curls heavenward in a bright, leafy spiral, and, in one of the book's most frightening moments, the giant wakes from his slumber, raising one thorny eyelid.

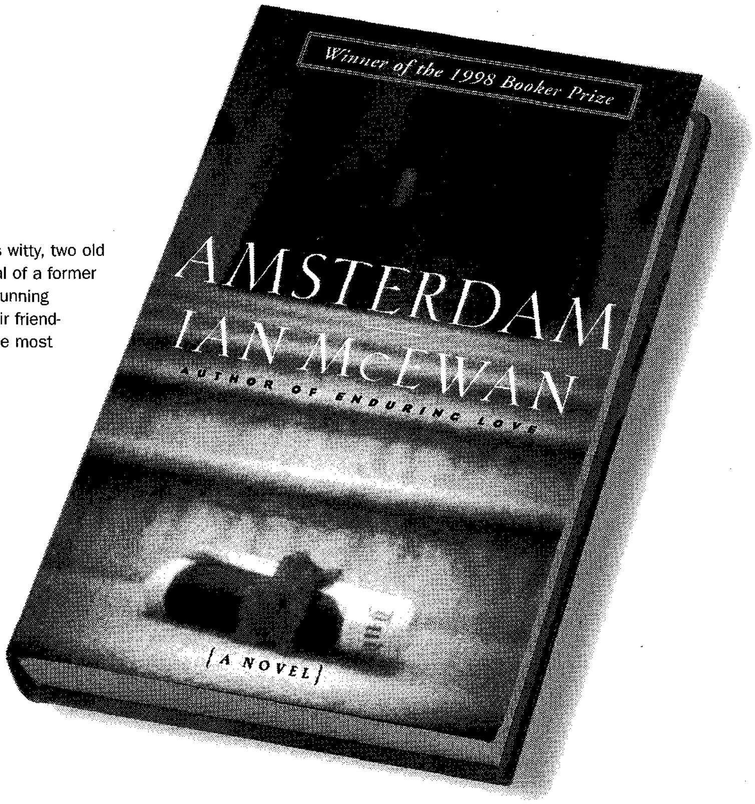
Adults will appreciate two more high-minded titles: **Botticelli's Bed & Breakfast** (Simon & Schuster Editions), by Jan Pieńkowski, a fold-out inn where Monet's water lilies float in the toilet and Vermeer works on a paint-by-numbers set in the attic; and Ron Van der Meer and Deyan Sudjic's **The Architecture Pack** (Knopf), a pop-up history of buildings, from the Colosseum to the Getty Center.

Very young readers will warm to David A. Carter and Alan Benjamin's **Curious Critters** (Little Simon), with its zooful of such oddities as the acrobaterpillars, who flip and twirl on strings and will undoubtedly tempt small hands to crush them. Robert Sabuda, for one, welcomes such interaction. "Kids are so oversaturated with video games and different channels," he says. "At least if they're ripping into a pop-up book their joy is physical."

CHRISTOPH NEIMANN

Books.
[AT BARNES & NOBLE]

Ian McEwan: Winner of the 1998 Booker Prize for Fiction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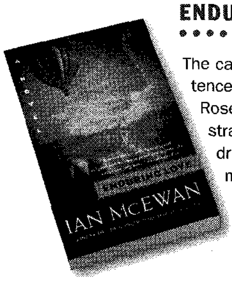
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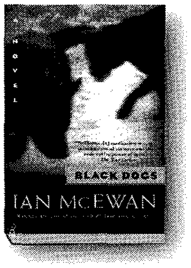
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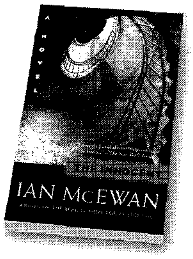
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Frosch; Patrick Summers. (Dec. 24 and Dec. 31 at 7, Dec. 28 at 7:30, and Jan. 2 at 1:30. . . . **NOTE:** The New Year's Eve performance includes surprise visits from, and entertainment by, luminary guests in the Act II party scene.) . . . **LA TRAVIATA,** with Ainhoa Arteta, Marcelo Alvarez, and Vladimir Chernov; Carlo Rizzi. (Dec. 26 at 8.) . . . With Ms. Arteta, Marcello Giordani, and Mr. Chernov; Scott Bergeson. (Dec. 30 at 7:30 and Jan. 4 at 8.) . . . **KÁTYA KABANOVÁ,** by Janáček, with Catherine Malfitano, Eva Randová, Katarina Karnéus, Peter Straka, Mark Baker, Paul Charles Clarke, and Sergei Koptchak; Mr. Mackerras. (Jan. 2 and Jan. 5 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000.)

AMATO OPERA COMPANY—Dec. 26 at 11:30 A.M.: An abbreviated family performance of "The Barber of Seville." . . . ¶ Dec. 26 and Jan. 2 at 7:30 and Dec. 27 and Jan. 3 at 2:30: Final performances of a macaronic production of "The Barber of Seville," in which the major numbers are sung in Italian and the recitatives in English. . . . ¶ Jan. 2 at 11:30 A.M.: An abridged version, for families, of "Hansel and Gretel." (Amato Opera Theatre, 319 Bowery, at 2nd St. 228-8200.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC—At Avery Fisher Hall, Kurt Masur conducting. Dec. 29 at 7:30: Two powerful Fifth Symphonies with exultant finales, by Beethoven and Shostakovich. . . . ¶ Dec. 31 at 8: A festive evening given over to music by three Strausses: Johann, Sr. (his "Radetzky" March); his son, Johann, Jr. (waltzes, marches, and polkas, plus selections from "Die Fledermaus"); and Richard, unrelated to either, genealogically speaking (excerpts from "Der Rosenkavalier"). Sopranos Deborah Voigt and Noemi Nadelmann and mezzo-soprano Angelika Kirchschlager take turns in arias and team up for ensembles.) . . . ¶ Jan. 2 at 2: Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto (featuring Sherry Staples, who has recently joined the orchestra as its principal associate concertmaster) and his Symphony No. 6 (the "Pathétique"). . . . **NOTE:** On Dec. 27 at 5, also in Avery Fisher Hall, the orchestra hosts the Klezmer Conservatory Band in a Hanukkah concert.

NEW YORK STRING ORCHESTRA—At Carnegie Hall, Jaime Laredo leads the annual convocation of advanced students of string-playing. Dec. 24 at 7: An all-Mozart program, comprising the Overture to "Le Nozze di Figaro," the C-Minor Piano Concerto (featuring Peter Serkin), and the Symphony No. 35 (the "Haffner"). . . . ¶ Dec. 28 at 8: Prokofiev's Symphony No. 1 (the "Classical"), Elgar's Introduction and Allegro for Strings (featuring the Guarneri Quartet), and Beethoven's Symphony No. 2. Completing the program is a work that marks a sort of homecoming—Vivaldi's B-Minor Concerto for Four Violins and Orchestra, here spotlighting four New York String Orchestra alumni who have gone on to become concertmasters of leading American orchestras: Martin Chalifour (of the Los Angeles Philharmonic), Herbert Greenberg (Baltimore Symphony), Malcolm Lowe (Boston Symphony), and William Preucil (Cleveland Orchestra).

LITTLE ORCHESTRA SOCIETY—Presenting family performances of Prokofiev's "Peter and the Wolf," in a staged theatrical adaptation by Dino Anagnost, who conducts. (Kaye Playhouse, Hunter College, Park Ave. at 68th St. Dec. 26-27 at 10:30 A.M., noon, 2, and 3:30 and Dec. 28 at 12:30 and 2. For information about tickets, call 971-9500.)

P. D. Q. BACH—"Professor" Peter Schickele, the world's most subversive musicologist (excepting those who occupy tenured positions, of course), empties out yet another wheelbarrowful of manuscripts by his favorite composer: the "Abduction of Figaro" Overture, the "Four Next-to-Last Songs," the Prelude to "Einstein on the Fritz," the "No-No Nonette," and "Blaues Gras (Bluegrass Cantata)." Not for the faint of heart. (Carnegie Hall. Dec. 27 at 2 and Dec. 29 at 8.)

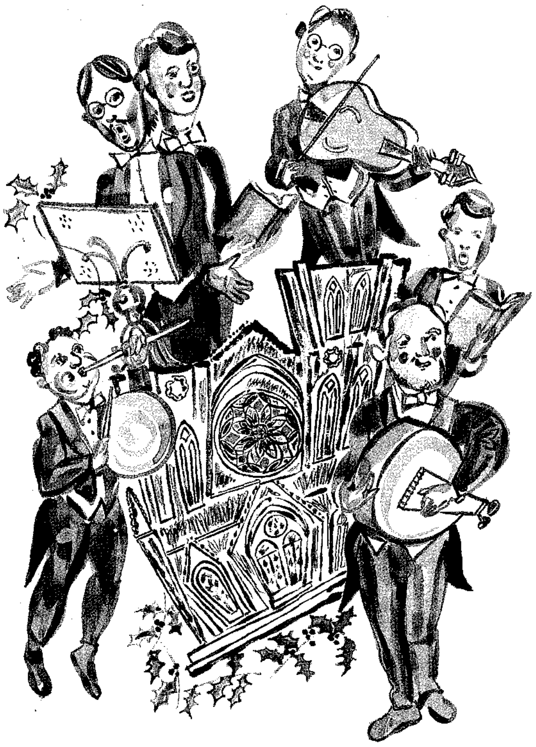
NEW ENGLAND SYMPHONIC ENSEMBLE—Earl Rivers and Larry K. Ball take turns at the podium to lead the orchestra and numerous regional church, university, and community choirs in John Rutter's "Gloria" and "Te Deum," as well as Britten's "World of the Spirit." The concert also includes traditional Chinese selections performed by the Han-S Chorus from Taipei (directed by Chyi-Lin Hong). (Carnegie Hall. Dec. 30 at 8.)

JUPITER SYMPHONY—Jens Nygaard conducts an encyclopedic New Year's Eve Beethoven doubleheader, featuring pianist Anton Kuerti as the soloist in all six pieces being presented. Dec. 31 at 5: The Piano Concertos No. 2, No. 3, and No. 4. . . . ¶ At 9: Following a two-hour dinner break, the "Choral Fantasy" and the Piano Concertos No. 1 and No. 5. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100.)

AMOR ARTIS—Johannes Somary directs the choir and orchestra in Bach's motet "Komm, Jesu, komm," D-Major "Sanctus" (BWV 241), Cantata No. 172, and Fourth Orchestral Suite. Completing the program are Handel's Coronation Anthem No. 1 ("Zadok the Priest") and Vivaldi's C-Major Concerto "per flautino" (RV 443, the "little flute" here being a sopranino recorder, played by Nina Stern). (St. Jean Baptiste Church, Lexington Ave. at 76th St. Dec. 31 at 8. For information about tickets, call 874-4513.)

RECITALS

BARGEMUSIC— As is its wont at year's end, this purveyor of chamber music offers Bach's "Brandenburg" Concertos. Dec. 24: The Concertos No. 2, No. 4, and No. 5. . . . ¶ Dec. 27: The Concertos No. 6, No. 3, and No. 1. . . . ¶ Dec. 31: The complete set of six concertos, in a broadcast benefit performance. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-4061. Evenings at 7:30.)



A Christmas program by New York's Ensemble for Early Music, celebrating a quarter-century of performances at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine.

PIER CONSAGRA

"SUNDAYS ON THE ISLAND"—Dec. 27 at noon: Presenting Schubert's "Trout" Quintet (plus a few short pieces), with violinist Yosuke Kawasaki, violist Ori Kam, cellist Iris Regev, double-bassist Steven Moran, and pianist Ilan Rechtman. . . . ¶ Jan. 3 at noon: Violinist and conductor Yuval Waldman leads the City Island Baroque Ensemble in works by Bach, Vivaldi, Rossini, and Mr. Rechtman; with soprano Cleo Reiss and violinist Ariel Shamai. (Le Refuge Inn, 620 City Island Ave., City Island, the Bronx. 718-885-2478.)

SALON SOIRÉES—Dec. 27 at 6 and 8: Schubert's "Trout" Quintet, plus music by Sarasate and Ilan Rechtman. . . . ¶ Jan. 3 at 6 and 8: Soprano Cleo Reiss, assisted by Mr. Rechtman at the piano, performs songs by Schumann and arias by Bach and Handel. (Hotel Wales, Madison Ave. at 92nd St. No tickets necessary.)

ANDREW BOLOTOWSKY—Flutist, playing transcriptions of Bach's first four Unaccompanied Cello Suites and his A-Minor Sonata for Unaccompanied Violin. (Theodore Roosevelt Birthplace, 28 E. 20th St. Jan. 2 at 2. No tickets required beyond museum admission.)

ALL SEASONS CHAMBER PLAYERS—Performing Arensky's D-Minor Piano Trio; Philippe Gaubert's "Trois Aquarelles" for Flute, Cello, and Piano; Martinů's "Madrigal" for Flute, Violin, and Piano; and a sonatina for piano four-hands by Carl Czerny. (Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church, Madison Ave., at 73rd St. Jan. 3 at 4. Admission by contribution.)

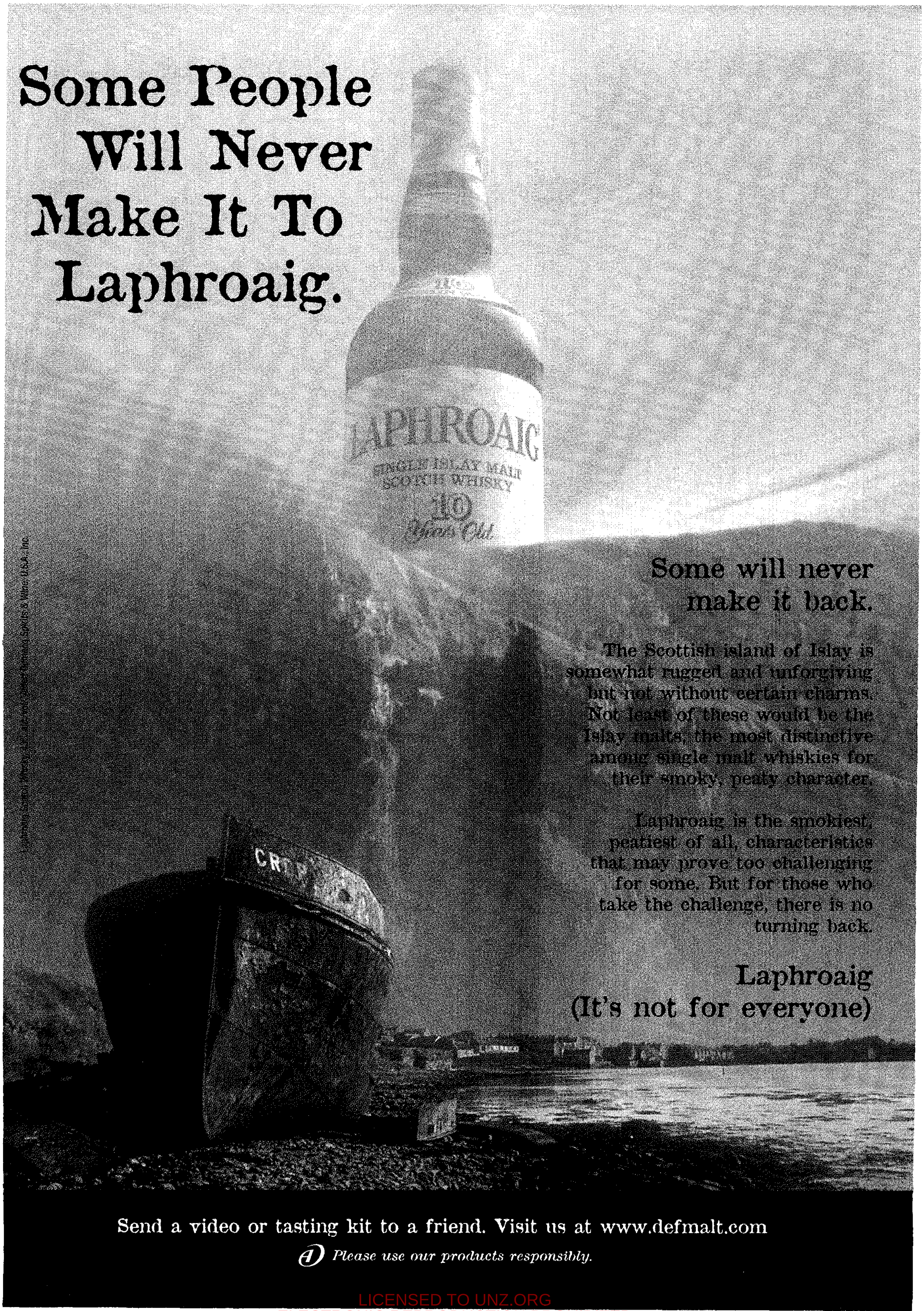
ABOVE AND BEYOND

HOLIDAY DUNKING—Basketball fans can find some relief from this year's N.B.A. lockout by taking in the college action at Madison Square Garden. The annual E.C.A.C. Holiday Festival pits a couple of local teams, Hofstra and Iona, against out-of-town powerhouse Georgia Tech and Ivy League contender the University of Pennsylvania. You might end up sitting next to onetime Georgia Tech point guards (and currently unoccupied professionals) Kenny Anderson and Stephon Marbury. (Dec. 26 at 1 and Dec. 27 at noon. 465-6741.) . . . ¶ Women's college basketball returns to the Garden for the first time in seventeen years when Rutgers takes on Tennessee. (Jan. 3 at 2.)

WORDS TO BEGIN THE NEW YEAR BY—Jan. 1, from 2 to midnight: Eric Bogosian, Jim Carroll, Vernon Reid, Rick Moody, and more than a hundred and twenty other poets, musicians, dancers, and artists perform at the Poetry Project's twenty-fifth annual New Year's Day Marathon Reading. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave at 10th St. Tickets at the door.) . . . ¶ Jan. 1, from 2 to midnight: Jennifer Blowdryer, Amanda Vogel, Eve Packer, and another hundred or so writers, actors, and musicians take the stage at "Nuclear Winter: The Alternative New Year's Day Spoken Word/Performance Extravaganza." (Café Nico, 101 Avenue A, between 6th and 7th Sts., second floor. No tickets necessary.)

TALK—Jan. 4 at 6: Christopher Bigsby, director of the Arthur Miller Center at the University of East Anglia in Norwich, England, interviews Arthur Miller. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100.)

WALKS—Dec. 25 at 10:30 and 1: Big Onion Walking Tours visits the Jewish Lower East Side. For more information, call 439-1090. . . . ¶ Dec. 31 at 2, 4, 6, and 8: Howard Goldberg, of Adventure on a Shoestring, leads a stroll through Chinatown. For more information, call 265-2663.



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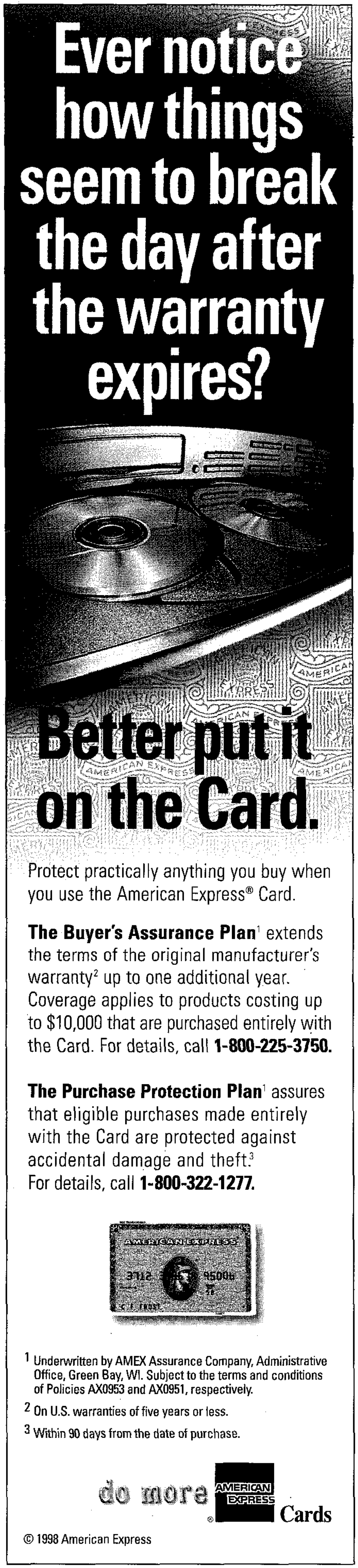

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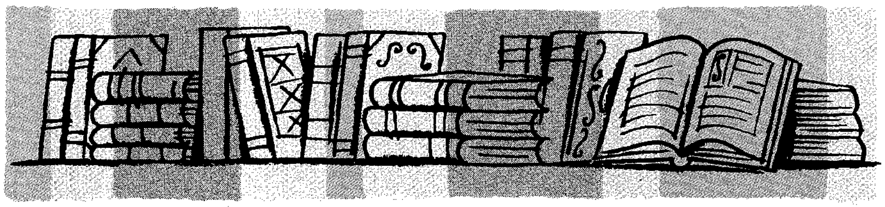
ON AND OFF THE AVENUE

Bookishness

Now that it's possible to buy a book with just a click or two on the Net, it's comforting to know that there is still at least one shop where you can hold a leather-bound Book of Hours, printed in Bruges in 1465, which can be yours for a mere $780,000. This antiquated experience can be had in the hushed chambers of **H. P. Kraus**, the city's preëminent dealer in rare books, which occupies five floors of an old-fashioned town house (16 E. 46th St.; 687-4808). Its proprietor is Mary Ann Folter, whose father founded the firm in 1946. Kraus's specialty, Ms. Folter says, while leafing through the pages of a sixteenth-century Coverdale Bible ($285,000), is incunabula—that is, books and manuscripts printed within fifty years of Gutenberg's invention of movable type. She unboxes a pair of blood-colored volumes with a price tag of $175,000—the first printed edition of the works of Homer in Greek, published in 1488. Next she wrestles with the clasp of a 1477 encyclopedia priced at $75,000. "Listen," she says, flipping through the book's pages to produce a noise that sounds like cards being shuffled. "Pages that are still stiff make it an outstanding book." Finally, she brings out a relative bargain—illuminated pages, taken from incomplete manuscripts, that start at $150. "Framed, they make a great detail in any house," she suggests.

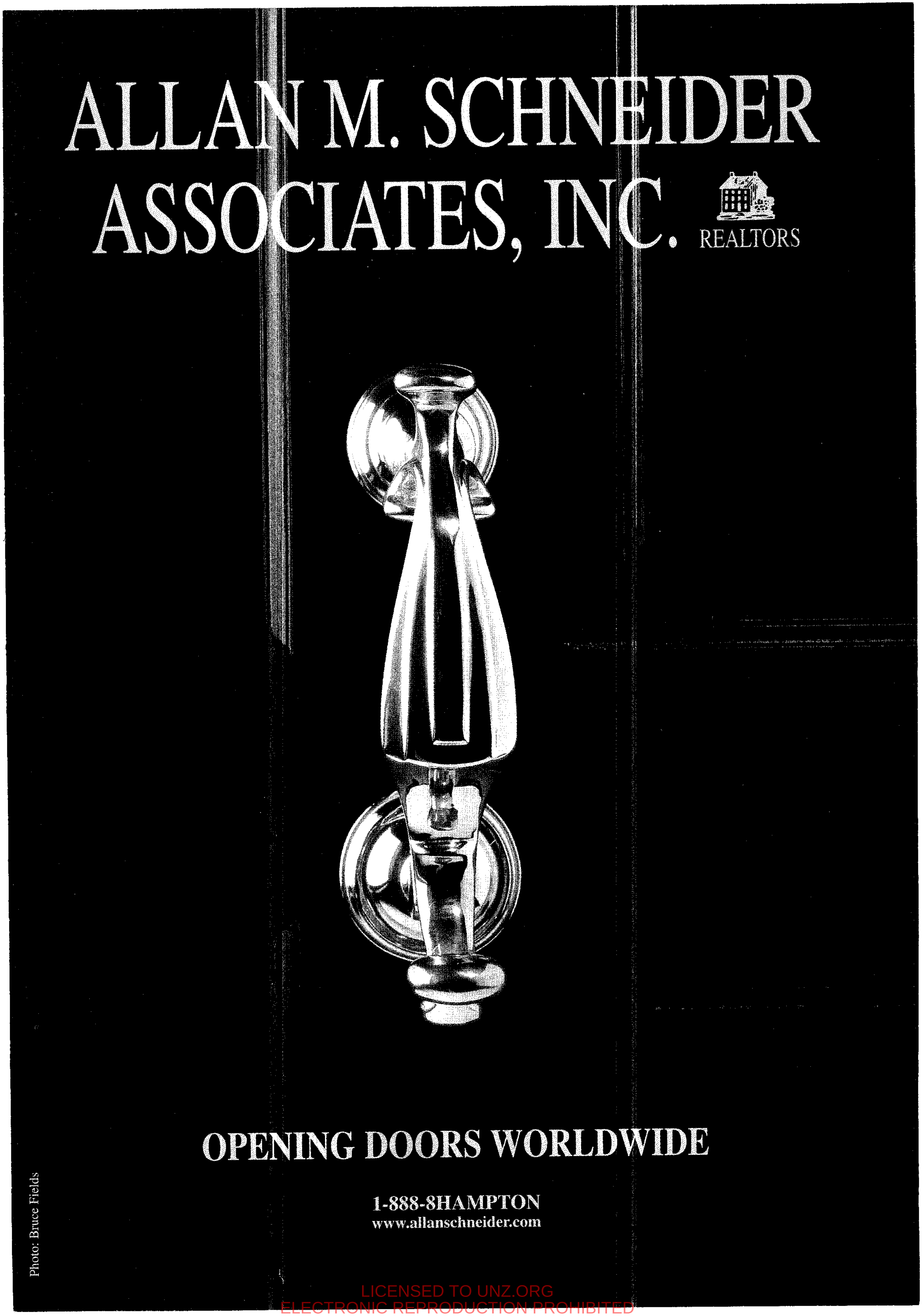


For bibliophiles with more eclectic tastes, **Ursus Rare Books**, on the second floor of the Carlyle Hotel (981 Madison Ave.; 772-8787), has everything from "The Compleat Gard'ner" ($5,500), a seventeenth-century best-seller by Louis XIV's royal groundskeeper, to an ironic copy of Al Campanis's "The Dodgers' Way to Play Baseball" ($5,000), signed by the 1955 Brooklyn Dodgers, including Jackie Robinson. Pulling down "Bowditch's Practical Navigator" ($7,500), a nineteenth-century sailing manual, the shop's co-owner, William Wyer, says that the volume is a rare surviving example of a title whose usefulness meant that it was "almost always destroyed on the high seas." Ursus stocks one of the city's largest collections of hard-to-find art books, as well as plenty of literary jaw-droppers. "I can't keep Henry James or James Joyce or the Brontë sisters on the shelf," Wyer says. Asked how he discovers these treasures, he replies, "The story behind every great book seems to be that it's been stolen or lost in a war." He mentions an abbot from Germany who, while scrolling through the shop's inventory (which is listed at ursusbooks.com), discovered a Bible that had been missing from his monastery for five hundred years.

Duncan Andrews, a bibliographer at **James Cummins Bookseller** (699 Madison Ave.; 688-6441), says that his store "isn't open only to millionaires." Although some of the shop's titles are priced in the thousands of dollars—one of the heftiest tags hangs on a set of "Winnie-the-Pooh" books signed by A. A. Milne and the illustrator E. H. Shepard ($20,000)—many are considerably less expensive. Cummins is renowned for its collection of sporting books, with titles like "The Ristigouche and Its Salmon Fishing." Andrews admits that rare-book dealers do, in fact, judge books by their covers. An ordinary first edition of "The Great Gatsby," for example, might be worth no more than $1,500, he says, but a copy with the original blue jacket might go for $25,000.

Oaklander Books (547 W. 27th St.; 594-4210) specializes in books about books. A fluorescent-lit nook on the fifth floor of a Chelsea warehouse, the shop is a trove of documents from the heyday of early modernism, when artists were busy crossing the border between commercial and fine art. The main focus of the proprietor, Irving Oaklander, is on "pre-Nazi German design." Many of his customers are artists and designers who might be interested in oddities like "Typografia" ($495), an avant-garde Czechoslovakian journal from 1927, or a dazzling 1928 album of French Art Deco posters ($2,750), entitled "Pan." Oaklander says proudly, "You won't find a first-edition Hemingway here."

DUPUY-BERBERIAN



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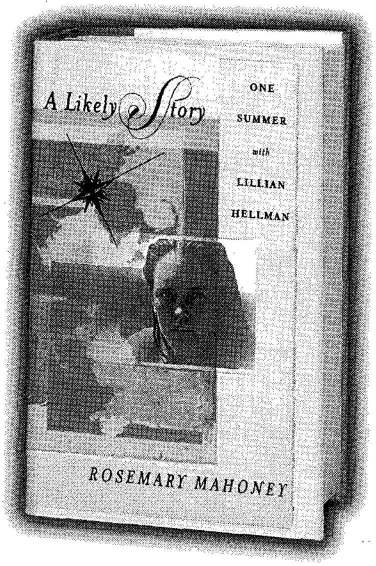
“Heartbreaking and hilarious, Mahoney’s sharp prose illuminates this memoir of lost innocence and fallen idols.”*



“**Riveting...**It was Lillian Hellman’s misjudgment to hire a valet with a fierce sense of morality, an exquisite eye for detail, a sharp eye for character...absorbing and damning.”
—Christopher Lehmann-Haupt, *The New York Times*

“This **brave and heart-wrenching** book is the final evidence that, as far as writers go, Mahoney is the real thing.”
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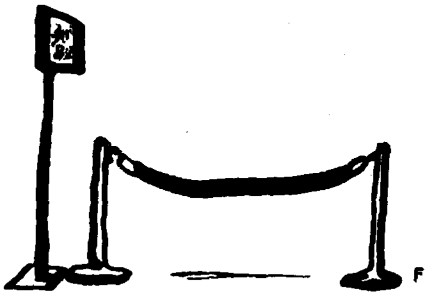


THE MOVIES

OPENING

Affliction—Paul Schrader’s story of a small-town New Hampshire police officer and a mysterious death, with Nick Nolte, James Coburn, Willem Dafoe, Sissy Spacek, and Mary Beth Hurt. Opening Dec. 30. (Angelika Film Center.)

A Civil Action—A courtroom thriller, with John Travolta, Robert Duvall, and William H. Macy. Directed by Steven Zaillian. Opening Dec. 25. (Lincoln Square.)

Down in the Delta—Maya Angelou directed this story of a family in Chicago which moves back to its home in Mississippi. With Alfre Woodard, Al Freeman, Jr., Esther Rolle, Mary Alice, Loretta Devine, and Wesley Snipes. Opening Dec. 25. (Chelsea Cinemas, Criterion Center, East 85th Street, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, and Village East Cinemas.)

The Faculty—A science-fiction thriller about a high school where the teachers are more than a little strange. Written by Kevin Williamson; directed by Robert Rodriguez. Opening Dec. 25.

Hilary & Jackie—Rachel Griffiths and Emily Watson play the real-life du Pré sisters, the pianist and the cellist, in this Anand Tucker film. Opening Dec. 30. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Union Square.)

The Hi-Lo Country—Stephen Frears’s drama about two veterans of the Second World War who return to their home town in New Mexico and to the women they love. With Billy Crudup, Woody Harrelson, Patricia Arquette, and Penelope Cruz. Opening Dec. 30. (19th Street East 6 and 64th and 2nd.)

Hurlyburly—A black comedy about Hollywood, with Sean Penn, Kevin Spacey, Robin Wright Penn, Chazz Palminteri, Garry Shandling, Anna Paquin, and Meg Ryan. Anthony Drazan directed David Rabe’s screenplay, based on his play. Opening Dec. 25. (Angelika Film Center, Chelsea Cinemas, Lincoln Square, and 19th Street East 6.)

Mighty Joe Young—An adventure story about a fifteen-foot gorilla who is brought from Central Africa to California. With Bill Paxton and Charlize Theron; directed by Ron Underwood. Opening Dec. 25. (Chelsea Cinemas, Criterion Center, Cinema I, Lincoln Square, and Union Square.)

Patch Adams—A comic drama about a real-life medical student (Robin Williams) who uses laughter to help his patients. Directed by Tom Shadyac. Opening Dec. 25. (Beekman, Chelsea Cinemas, Criterion Center, 84th Street Sixplex, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 34th Street Showplace, Union Square, and Waverly.)

Port Djema—The adventures of a French surgeon (Jean-Yves Dubois) in an East African country. Directed by Eric Heumann. In French. Opening Jan. 1. (Cinema Village.)

Stepmom—Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Dec. 25. (Criterion Center, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, and Village Theatre VII.)

The Swindle—Claude Chabrol’s story of two grifters, played by Isabelle Huppert and Michel Serrault. In French. Opening Dec. 23. (BAM Rose Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Quad Cinema.)

The Theory of Flight—A romantic story of a woman with Lou Gehrig’s disease (Helena Bonham Carter) and her caregiver (Kenneth Branagh). Directed by Paul Greengrass. Opening Dec. 23. (Beekman, Regency, and Village East Cinemas.)

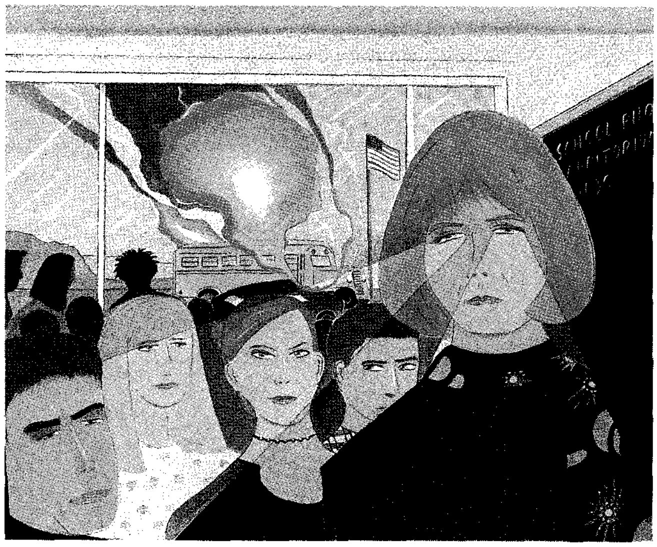
The Thin Red Line—Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Dec. 23. (Union Square and Ziegfeld.)

Zakir and His Friends—Lutz Leonhardt’s documentary about the Indian percussionist Zakir Hussain. In English, French, and Japanese. Dec. 23-Jan. 5. (Film Forum.)

FILM NOTES

(If a movie has been reviewed recently in The Current Cinema, the date of its review is given.)

Babe: Pig in the City—The sequel that surpasses the original. Babe, the extraordinarily polite pig with the sweetly persistent manner, tries to raise money in the great megalopolis for the ailing Hoggett farm. There Babe discovers a land of violence and sadness. At an animal hotel, Babe falls in with a circus family of monkeys, including a hip chimpanzee couple and a morose orangutan—the animals, who speak in dark ironies, have the real depression of lifetime circus performers. There is also an irascible, motoring Jack Russell terrier, whose arthritic hindquarters are mounted on wheels, and a variety of predatory mastiffs with an eye for porkers. Like its illustrious predecessor, “Babe: Pig in the City” has slightly oversaturated children’s-book colors—oranges and yellows and blues—but the emotional tone of this movie is painfully funny, with violent, sardonic, and knowing touches that may leave children slightly baffled. The director, George Miller, works low to the ground, from the animals’ point of view, and with great cartoon intensity. As before, the three mice, singing French cabaret songs and a bit of Deano, serenade each section of the movie. Written by Miller, Judy Morris, and Mark Lamprell.—*David Denby* (Chelsea Cinemas, Criterion Center, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, Park & 86th Street East, and Village East Cinemas.)



Opening Dec. 25, Robert Rodriguez’s “The Faculty.”

GEOFFREY PARKER

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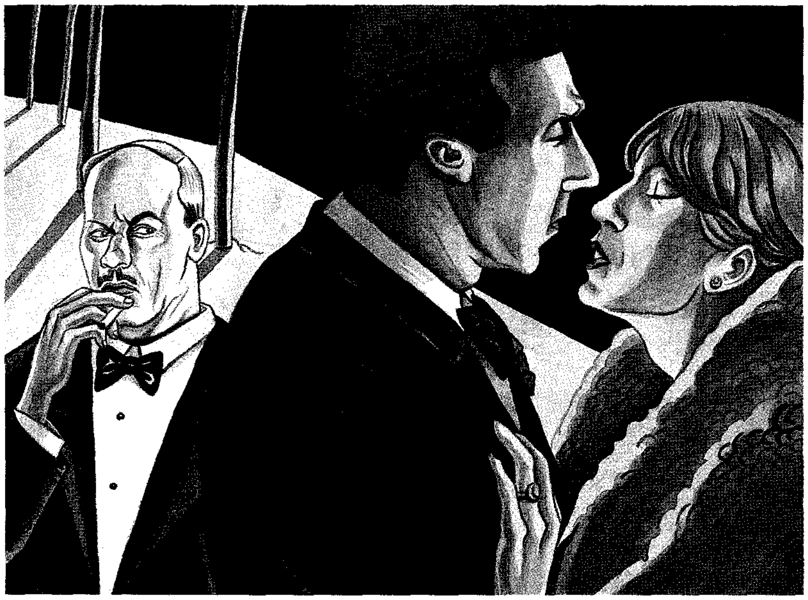
Bell' Antonio (1960)—Antonio (Marcello Mastroianni, in perhaps his most delicate, muted performance) is a Sicilian Don Juan whose life is destroyed by the conflict between sacred and profane love. He is expected to profess the Church's belief in purity while acting out his father's belief that sexual prowess is the measure of a man, but Antonio really believes in purity and love. And so, although he is a great ladies' man with "loose" women or women of a lower social class, he is impotent with the pure, highborn girl whom he loves and marries. This proud, handsome hero is never for an instant comic; what is so often treated from the outside as a subject for comedy is here treated from the inside—from the point of view of the humiliated, desolate man. Mauro Bolognini directed this gentle satirical study of virility and social position in a Catholic culture. In Italian.—*Pauline Kael* (Walter Reade Theatre; Jan. 4.)

A Bug's Life—Okay for children. An ant colony tries to save itself from the aggressions of local grasshoppers by employing a bug circus in its defense. The Disney/Pixar animation is pastel-pretty kid stuff (the insects look like brightly colored plastic toys), and all the ants talk in cutely self-conscious locutions out of a sitcom, but the bug's-eye view of the world has its surprises and casual enchantments. With Kevin Spacey as the voice of the menacing chief grasshopper. Co-directed by John Lasseter and Andrew Stanton.—*D.D.* (Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema II, Guild, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema, Orpheum VII, and Village East Cinemas.)

Celebrity—Woody Allen assembles yet another all-star cast; this time, stardom itself is the object of his attention. Kenneth Branagh, trying out a Woody Allen impersonation that makes you want to hide under your seat and cram popcorn in your ears, plays a journalist with an itch. He hops from a rotten marriage with Robin (Judy Davis) to an actress (Melanie Griffith), and from there to a supermodel (Charlize Theron) with erogenous zones all over her body; he then takes up with a book editor of rare beauty (Famke Janssen), whom for some unfathomable reason he discards in favor of another actress (Winona Ryder). The hero's restlessness infects the rest of the movie; the story feels febrile and unhappy, and Allen seems to take his dissatisfaction out on his helpless characters—especially the women. Filmed in black-and-white by Sven Nykvist.—*Anthony Lane* (11/23/98) (Chelsea West, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 62nd & Broadway, and Village East Cinemas.)

Central Station—Against her nature, Dora (Fernanda Montenegro), an intelligent but nihilistic old bag—a retired schoolteacher who writes letters for illiterate people and then never mails them—leaves Rio de Janeiro with a little boy in tow and takes to the road. The boy's mother has been killed, and his desire to see his missing father stirs something in Dora. The two of them are practically hoboes, but once they leave Rio life opens up for them. This shrewd, tough, and bighearted Brazilian movie, directed by Walter Salles, moves surely and convincingly from utter negation to something like guarded optimism. In Portuguese.—*D.D.* (11/30/98) (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

Dancing at Lughnasa—Pat O'Connor's film version of Brian Friel's play rattles the bars of a lyrical, well-made work but doesn't burst through them, and in the end one is let down. Meryl Streep stars as the smartest and most thoroughly defeated of the five unmarried Mundy sisters living on a farm in Donegal, Ireland, in the thirties; Michael Gambon, too much becalmed, is the brother who returns from Africa in thrall to the rituals and freedoms of a non-Christian culture. The movie is wistful and touching but not much more. With Kathy Burke, Brid Brennan, Sophie Thompson, and Catherine McCormack. Frank McGuinness did the adaptation.—*D.D.* (First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Union Square.)



Opening Dec. 23, Claude Chabrol's "The Swindle."

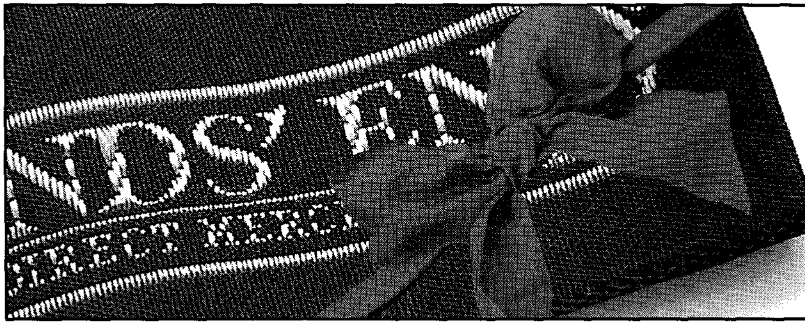
JENNY WILLIAMS

Elizabeth—A grisly, flamboyant account of the Virgin Queen's early days as a monarch. Screenwriter Michael Hirst alters and conflates events that took place over many years—by degrees, Elizabeth (Cate Blanchett), a Protestant surrounded by powerful Catholics, takes control of England by pulling off a kind of internal coup d'état. The means of her ascension is Sir Francis Walsingham (Geoffrey Rush), a perfect Machiavellian character who serves the Queen as adviser, deadly assassin, and spy. Elizabeth's climb to power, however, is a personal disaster: the supple-waisted maiden with long red hair becomes stiff and harsh, emerging from her youth white-faced and trapped in the armor of a thick brocade dress. The movie is a horror film masquerading as a historical pageant. Directed by Shekhar Kapur.—*D.D.* (11/16/98) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Lincoln Square, New York Twin, 19th Street East 6, and Village Theatre VII.)

Enemy of the State—In this breathlessly paranoid Tony Scott thriller, a young Washington labor lawyer (Will Smith) unwittingly receives some incriminating evidence of wrongdoing by an official (Jon Voight) high up in the National Security Agency. The official wants it back. Despite much blather about the right to privacy, the movie is essentially an endless chase, in which Smith is pursued and spied on by vans, cameras, bugs, tape recorders, satellites, helicopters, computers, voice analyzers, humans, and two spotted owls. The movie goes like the wind, but it's more a technological exercise than anything else.—*D.D.* (Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Embassy 1, Murray Hill Cinemas, Orpheum VII, Sutton, and Union Square.)

The General—John Boorman's deadpan-cool celebration of the real-life Irish thief and populist hero Martin Cahill, who died in 1994. As embodied by the great Irish actor Brendan Gleeson, Cahill may be the least glamorous gangster in motion-picture history. Gleeson has a thick, heavy neck, a massive forehead and jowls, and a large doughy body. Moving along Dublin's streets and alleys with the hood of his jacket pulled over his head, he might be an animated potato sack, or perhaps some round, disconsolate creature—a hedgehog or beaver—raptly concentrating on the terrain before him. Cahill is in fact a criminal genius and a fantastically aggressive personality, and his lack of obvious panache amounts to an enormous exercise in irony. He always defeats expectations (even in death), and so does the movie. With Jon Voight as the Dublin police inspector who lacks the sense of humor to understand what Cahill is up to. In black-and-white.—*D.D.* (12/21/98) (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

Gods and Monsters—In the nineteen-fifties, the British-born director James Whale, who had lent depth and dignity to the horror film with "Frankenstein" and "Bride of Frankenstein," idled away his time, all but forgotten by the movie industry, in Pacific Palisades, California; eventually, he drowned in his pool. Bill Condon's elegant



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and tactful picture, based on Christopher Bram's novel "Father of Frankenstein," speculates on what might have happened in those final days. The inquiry draws fine performances from Ian McKellen as the dandyish Whale and from Brendan Fraser as his (wholly fictitious) gardener, Clayton Boone, with whom the older man becomes obsessed. With Lynn Redgrave as a Puritan housekeeper.—*A.L.* (11/9/98) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema.)

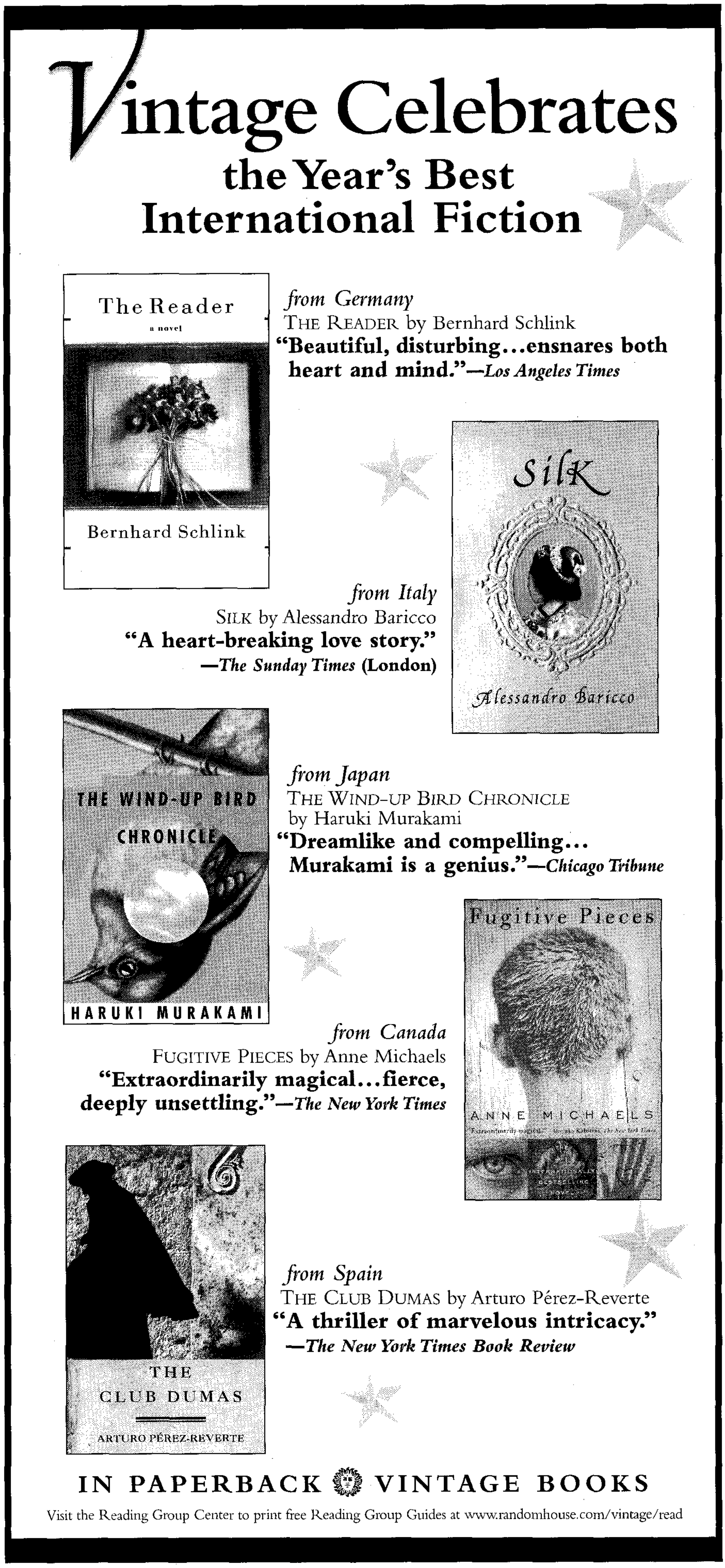
HALF OF HEAVEN (1986)—The gorgeous and talented Angela Molina gets to be all things to nearly all guys in this bizarre entertainment from Spain's Manuel Gutiérrez Aragón (best known here for his 1982 "Demons in the Garden"). She starts out as a stalwart farm girl with a grandmother who acts like a fairy godmother and a father who acts like the macho patriarch in a fairy tale; he's enraged that, after her marriage to a handsome knife-grinder, she gives birth to a girl instead of a boy. She flees to Madrid, where she opens a stall in the public market, peddling such delicacies as bull testicles. While she uses simple yet ingenious country ways (including a wicked recipe for rice pudding) to win over the widowed Minister of Markets and Provisions, she also develops an urbane, seductive self-awareness. In this bubbling (sometimes lumpy) blend of realism and surrealism, nothing throws the plucky Molina—or Margarita Lozano, as her cigar-puffing grandma, or Caroline Silva, as her endearingly cryptic daughter. In Spanish.—*Michael Sragow* (Walter Reade Theatre; Dec. 24, Dec. 26, and Dec. 29.)

LIFE IS BEAUTIFUL—Would that it were. The great, donkey-faced Italian clown Roberto Benigni attempts an ambitious fable of comedy's redemptive power. He plays an Italian Jew who keeps alive his little boy's innocence in a Nazi concentration camp by pretending that the routines of the camp are no more than an intricate game staged for his son's benefit. But Benigni's ironic counter-reality undermines this movie, not the Nazis, who were beyond ridicule for the same reason that they were beyond rationality. Totalitarianism makes the fantastic literal—that is its demonic appeal. Benigni's jokes and games just aren't enough, and you leave the movie thinking that what's touching is not Benigni's ministrations to the little boy but his own need to believe in comedy as salvation. With Giorgio Cantarini, who has the heartbreaking quality of the children in the old neorealist movies, as the boy. In Italian.—*D.D.* (11/16/98) (Angelika Film Center and Paris.)

THE PRINCE OF EGYPT—Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (BAM Rose Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Olympia, Orpheum VII, 72nd Street East, State, 34th Street Showplace, and Union Square.)

PSYCHO—If the original did not exist, would this picture be worth seeing? Sure, but it's doubtful that Gus Van Sant's scrupulous, color reproduction would inspire much of a buzz. The famous murder sequences (the shower and the staircase) still work, but the triumphs belong more to the original storyboarding—and the moviegoer's memory of dread—than to Van Sant's small, lurid contributions. Anne Heche and Vince Vaughn try a bit too hard to bring fresh nuances to their iconic characters, but Julianne Moore, Viggo Mortensen, and especially William H. Macy allow the audience to set aside its comparisons and enjoy the clever narrative.—*Ken Marks* (84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, Metro Cinema, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, State, 34th Street Showplace, and Village Theatre VII.)

THE RED BALLOON (1956)—Albert Lamorisse's celebrated thirty-four-minute film without dialogue, about a small boy (his son, Pascal) who wanders all over Paris trailed by a balloon. It's an allegory of innocence and evil, set in a child's dream world. Elegantly photographed and with a durable appeal to children, though it lacks the passionate beauty of the director's other film on the same theme, "White Mane."—*P.K.* (Film Forum 2; Dec. 25-Jan. 1.)



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Shakespeare in Love—A ripely emotional comedy-fantasia—concocted by director John Madden and screenwriters Marc Norman and Tom Stoppard—of how Shakespeare came to write "Romeo and Juliet." In 1593, young Will (Joseph Fiennes), a stud with liquid eyes and full lips, is just an unhappy and unproductive hack, jealous of the greater Christopher Marlowe (Rupert Everett). At first the movie comes at us too broadly, with many facetiously anachronistic jokes about the grubby professional routines of the theatre. But Will falls in love with the fictional heiress Viola de Lesseps (Gwyneth Paltrow), and when these two poeticizing lovers climb into bed, and Shakespeare's quill begins to fly, the cleverness catches fire and "Shakespeare in Love" turns into an exciting literary-erotic entertainment. With Geoffrey Rush as the theatre manager Henslowe, Ben Affleck as the egotistical actor Ned Alleyn, Colin Firth as Gwyneth Paltrow's surly aristocratic suitor, and Judi Dench, topping her recent Victoria, as a supremely intelligent and wittily dominating Queen Elizabeth.—*D.D.* (12/21/98) (Angelika Film Center, Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema 3rd Avenue, and Lincoln Square. . . . ¶ Cinema I; through Dec. 24.)

A Simple Plan—A sturdy attempt to do a contemporary, snowbound "Treasure of the Sierra Madre." Three ordinary guys—a married college man who has settled into a routine job (Bill Paxton), his slightly woolly-brained brother (Billy Bob Thornton), and the town drunk and screwup (Brent Briscoe)—discover $4.4 million in a downed airplane lodged in the snow. What to do with the cash? The picture becomes a study of the nasty effects of greed and of the weakness of civilization's bonds. Director Sam Raimi, who once made shockers like "The Evil Dead," works seriously, but the story is fairly predictable, and the small-town, upper-Midwest locale is dreary and limited (we miss the gold-toothed Mexicans from "Treasure"). The movie leaves the unfortunate impression that the characters tear one another apart because there isn't much else to do. With Bridget Fonda as a scrupulous wife hit hard by the lure of big bucks. Screenplay by Scott B. Smith, based on his own novel.—*D.D.* (First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, and Village Theatre VII.)

Star Trek: Insurrection—Paramount's most lucrative long-running franchise (nine films in nineteen years) shows little wear and tear in this installment, perhaps the most colorful and relaxed of the series. In this story, the stalwart Captain Picard (Patrick Stewart) leads his multicultural starship crew in a rebellion to save a planet from the very Federation they serve so proudly. Director Jonathan Frakes (he plays Commander Riker) films much of the movie in the beautiful High Sierras, and the dramatic landscape grounds the action—it's a welcome relief from photon torpedoes detonating in space. "Insurrection" is a decidedly less bombastic entry in the series, and it works as a prelude to the likely fireworks of the next installment—the first "Star Trek" feature of the new millennium.—*Bruce Diones* (Astor Plaza, Coronet Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, 19th Street East 6, Olympia, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Showplace, and Village Theatre VII.)

Topper (1937)—Much fun; a sophisticated fantasy, with Cary Grant and Constance Bennett as a high-stepping married couple, George and Marion Kirby. Killed in an automobile accident, they return as elegant, ectoplasmic pranksters and drive banker Cosmo Topper (Roland Young) to happy distraction. Norman Z. McLeod directed this adaptation of a Thorne Smith novel; the picture was such a hit that it led to a series of movies and then to a TV series, but don't judge this one by what followed.—*P.K.* (American Museum of the Moving Image; Dec. 27.)

Waking Ned Devine—This picture is essentially a "very special episode" of the BBC TV show "Ballykissangel." There may be no official connection to the series, but fans will recognize actors, character types, a major plot device, even the name of the local pub as common to both enterprises. This is not a bad thing, since the actors are fine, the characters endearing, the plot funny, and the pub appropriately raucous and melodious; it's just not terribly energizing. Kirk Jones wrote and directed this tribute to the Irish spirit, which he sees as composed of equal parts avarice and poetry. Filmed on the Isle of Man.—*K.M.* (Chelsea West, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, and Union Square.)

You've Got Mail—Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Criterion Center, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, New York Twin, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

ALSO PLAYING

American History X: 59th Street East Cinema, First & 62nd Cinemas, and Village East Cinemas. . . . **The Celebration:** Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema. . . . **The Emperor's Shadow:** Cinema Village. . . . **Happiness** (reviewed in our issue of 10/19/98): BAM Rose Cinemas and Village East Cinemas. . . . **Hi Life:** The Screening Room. . . . **Jack Frost:** Chelsea Cinemas Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, State, and Union Square. . . . **Little Voice:** Gotham Cinema, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Union Square. . . . **Living Out Loud** (11/30/98): Chelsea Cinemas and Lincoln Square. . . . **Meet Joe Black** (11/23/98): First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, and Union Square. . . . **Very Bad Things:** First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, State, and Union Square. . . . **The Waterboy:** Art Greenwich Twin, Chelsea Cinemas, Embassy 2, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 64th and 2nd, and State.

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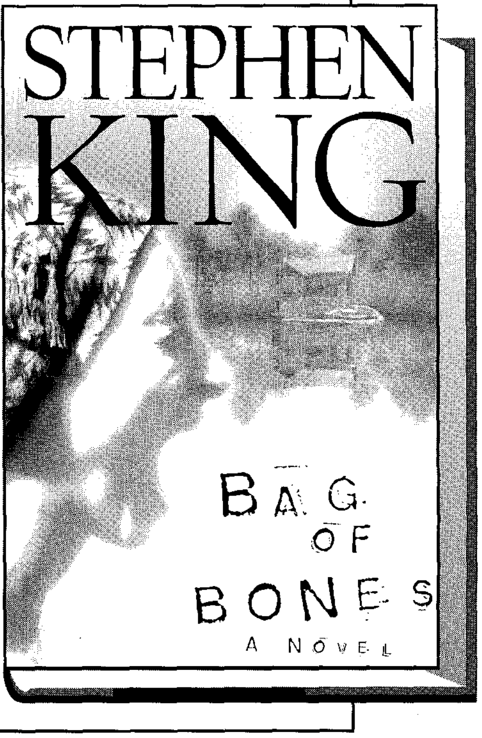
The New York Times Book Review



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REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

(Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.)

Film Forum 2 and 3, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—**theatre 2:** Through Dec. 24: A new director's cut of "The Last Emperor" (1987, Bernardo Bertolucci).... Dec. 25-Jan. 1 (matinées only): "The Red Balloon" (†) and "The 5,000 Fingers of Dr. T." (1953, Roy Rowland)....Dec. 25-31: "Touch of Evil" (1958, Orson Welles).... From Jan. 1: "Kiss Me Deadly" (1955, Robert Aldrich)....**theatre 3:** "Touch of Evil."

Museum of Modern Art, Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—A program of films from Brazil; all in Portuguese, with English subtitles. Dec. 24 at 2:30: "O Homem Que Virou Suco" (1980, João Batista de Andrade)....Dec. 24 at 6: "Sãn Paulo S/A" (1965, Luiz Sérgio Person).... Dec. 26 at 2: "Belly Up" (1997, Beto Brant)....Dec. 26 at 5: "Pixote" (1981, Hector Babenco)....Dec. 27 at 2: "Dona Flor and Her Two Husbands" (1976, Bruno Barreto)....Dec. 27 at 5: "A Falecida" (1965, Leon Hirszman)....Dec. 28 at 2:30: "Our Indians" (1996, Silvio Back)....Dec. 28 at 6: "Sergeant Getulio" (1982, Hermano Penna)....Dec. 29 at 2:30: "Night Games" (1965, Walter Hugo Khouri)....Dec. 29 at 6: "Triste Trópico" (1973, Arthur Omar).... Dec. 31 at 1: "Gaijin" (1980, Tizuka Yamasaki)....Dec. 31 at 5: "Bocage, the Triumph of Love" (1998, Djalma Limongi Batista)....Jan. 1 at 2:30: "Copacabana Fools Me" (1968, Antônio Carlos da Fontoura)....Jan. 1 at 6: "Black God, White Devil" (1964, Glauber Rocha)....Jan. 2 at 12:30: Short films....Jan. 2 at 2:30 and Jan. 5 at 6: "The Guns" (1963, Ruy Guerra).... Jan. 2 at 5: "Iracema" (1975, Jorge Bodansky and Orlando Senna)....Jan. 3 at 12:30: "Memories of Helen" (1969, David Neves)....Jan. 3 at 2:30: "Bahia de Todos os Santos" (1960, Trigueirinho Neto).... Jan. 3 at 5: "The Prophet of Hunger" (1969, Maurice Capovilla)....Jan. 4 at 2:30: "Soccer Players" (1997, Ugo Giorgetti)....Jan. 4 at 6: "O Anji Nasceu" (1969, Júlio Bressane)....Jan. 5 at 5: "The Red Light Bandit" (1968, Rogerio Sganzerla)....¶ Dec. 23 at 2:30: "Meet Me in St. Louis" (1944, Vincente Minnelli)....¶ Dec. 23 at 3: "The Nut" (1921, Theodore Reed; silent).... ¶ Dec. 26-27 at 1, 3, and 5; Dec. 28-29 at 6; Jan. 1-3 at 1, 3, and 5; and Jan. 5 at 6: Several different programs of short films made at the Lodz Film School in Poland.... ¶ Dec. 30 at 2:30: "The Mikado" (1939, Victor Schertzinger)....¶ Dec. 30 at 3: "Way Out West" (1937, James W. Horne).

Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (875-5600)—A retrospective of films by Manuel Gutiérrez Aragón; all in Spanish, with English subtitles. Dec. 23 at 2 and 6:15 and Dec. 26 at 6:30: "Demons in the Garden" (1982)....Dec. 23 at 4 and 8:15 and Dec. 24 at 2 and 6:40: "Ferocious" (1983).... Dec. 24 at 4:15 and 8:50, Dec. 26 at 4 and 8:30, and Dec. 29 at 2: "Half of Heaven" (†)....Dec. 27 at 4; Dec. 28 at 2, 5, and 8; and Dec. 31 at 2: "Don Quijote, Part I" (1992)....Dec. 27 at 7; Dec. 30 at 2, 5, and 8:10; and Dec. 31 at 5: "Don Quijote, Part II" (1992)....¶ Dec. 26-27 at 2: "Lili" (1953, Charles Walters)....¶ A program of films starring Marcello Mastroianni; in Italian, with English subtitles. Jan. 1 at 2 and 6:15: "Divorce Italian Style" (1962, Pietro Germi)....Jan. 1 at 4:10 and Jan. 2 at 7:30: "Marriage Italian Style" (1964, Vittorio De Sica)....Jan. 1 at 8:30 and Jan. 2 at 4:15: "La Dolce Vita" (1960, Federico Fellini)....Jan. 2 at 9:30 and Jan. 3 at 6:20: "The Organizer" (1963, Mario Monicelli)....Jan. 3 at 4:15 and 8:45: "A Special Day" (1977, Ettore Scola)....Jan. 4 at 2 and 9:15: "Bell' Antonio" (†)....Jan. 4 at 4: "Dark Eyes" (1987, Nikita Mikhalkov).... ¶ Jan. 2-3 at 2: "Brigadoon" (1954, Vincente Minnelli).

American Museum of the Moving Image, 35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Dec. 26 at 2: "Holiday" (1938, George Cukor), with Katharine Hepburn....Dec. 26 at 4: "The Philadelphia Story" (1940, Cukor), with Hepburn....Dec. 27 at 2: "What Price Hollywood?" (1932, Cukor), with Constance Bennett....Dec. 27 at 4: "Topper" (†)....Jan. 2 at 2: "The Divorcée" (1930, Robert Z. Leonard), with Norma Shearer....Jan. 2 at 4: "The Women" (1939, Cukor), with Shearer.... Jan. 3 at 2: "Grand Hotel" (1932, Edmund Goulding)....Jan. 3 at 4:30: "Sunset Boulevard" (1950, Billy Wilder), with Gloria Swanson.

Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (355-6160)—Jan. 5 at 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, and 9: "Artemisia" (1997, Agnès Merlet).

A Different Light Bookstore, 151 W. 19th St.—A Sunday-night series of free films (and popcorn). On Dec. 27 at 7, the feature will be "What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?" (1962, Robert Aldrich); on Jan. 3 at 7, "Double Indemnity" (1944, Billy Wilder).

Anthology Film Archives, 32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (505-5110)—Dec. 23 at 7 and 9, Dec. 24 at 6, Dec. 26 at 7 and 9, Dec. 27 at 6, Dec. 28 at 8:30, Dec. 29 at 7, Dec. 30 at 5, and Dec. 31 at 7: "Hallelujah the Hills" (1963, Adolfas Mekas)....Dec. 23-24 at 8 and 10, Dec. 26 at 3 and 5, Dec. 27 at 5:30 and 7:30, Dec. 28 at 6:30, Dec. 29 at 9, Dec. 30 at 10, and Dec. 31 at 5: "Lena's Dreams" (1997, Heather Johnston and Gordon Eriksen).

THEATRE ADDRESSES

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(For show times, call 777-FILM, except where noted.)

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Art Greenwich Twin, Greenwich Ave. at 12th St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn. 718-623-2770.
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinema I, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema II, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema 3rd Avenue, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363).
Coronet Cinemas, Third Ave. at 59th St.
Criterion Center, Broadway at 44th St.
East 85th Street, First Ave. at 85th St.
Eastside Playhouse, Third Ave. at 55th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
86th Street East Twin, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Embassy 1, 2, and 3, Seventh Ave. at 47th St.
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
Gotham Cinema, Third Ave. at 58th St.
Guild, 33 W. 50th St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St.
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Broadway at 99th St.
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 67th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (688-3800).
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
Regency, Broadway at 67th St.
The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
State, Broadway at 45th St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
34th Street Showplace, 238 E. 34th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Waverly 1 and 2, Sixth Ave. at 3rd St.
Worldwide Cinemas, 50th St. between Eighth and Ninth Aves.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

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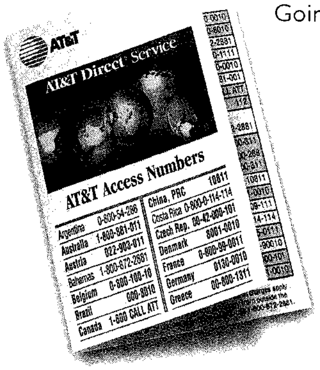

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THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT

No Exit.

TRUTH is dumber than fiction. It lacks the sly symmetries, the ironies, the perfectly calibrated epiphanies of a good yarn. It is lumpy and shapeless; it needs editing. It may mock melodrama—as our current national soap opera does—but it rarely rises to the quality of entertainment, let alone art.

The President's decision to bomb Iraq on the eve of the impeachment debate in the House of Representatives seemed, when viewed casually and at arm's length, the stuff of either bad drama or great satire. (The phrase "wag the dog" is now embedded in the political lexicon.) But it was neither. It was the inevitable result of a series of decisions—questionable decisions, it may be argued—that Bill Clinton had made as Commander-in-Chief over the past year. Last February, after Saddam Hussein, hoping to exploit the Lewinsky scandal, thwarted the efforts of United Nations arms inspectors, Clinton agreed to let Secretary-General Kofi Annan negotiate a deal with the Iraqis. This concession was frustrating to those who wanted the United States to take military action, but it had its logic. The path of international coöperation on economic sanctions and military restraints had been forged by Clinton's predecessor, George Bush, during and after the Gulf War. Annan's diplomacy had to be given a chance. But Clinton's failure to act with dispatch during the summer, when the deal collapsed, was inexplicable. Even worse was his decision, in November, to call off military strikes at the last minute when Saddam Hussein pledged yet again that he would coöperate, but that decision, at least, came with an unequivocal guarantee: if Iraq welshed on the deal there would be no more warnings.

Senator Joseph Lieberman, of Connecticut, says that the members of the Senate—including those, like Trent Lott, of Mississippi, who questioned the timing of the air strikes—were told weeks ago that if the supervising United Nations official, Richard Butler, reported Iraqi noncoöperation once more, there would be immediate military consequences. Butler made his report on Tuesday, December 15th; the consequences came on Wednesday, December 16th. The President could not have known when he postponed action in November that he would have to act on the eve of an impeachment vote. (In the afterglow of the fall election results he probably assumed that there would be no impeachment vote.) It can be argued that Clinton's foreign policy has been inept, but it was foolish and vengeful for some Republicans to insinuate that he bombed Iraq to avoid or to influence the impeachment debate. In fact, Clinton had to assume—given the relentlessness of the Republican assault—that the political consequences for him would be negative, and perhaps dangerously so. He bombed Iraq because he no longer had a choice.

If the Lewinsky scandal were a novel, a clever author might choose *this* moment to have public opinion turn against the President. It was, after all, the second time Bill Clinton had let loose the arsenal in a time of personal crisis. (The dubious missile attack on alleged terrorist operations in August—including the apparently capricious destruction of a chemical factory in Sudan—occurred just as the Starr investigation was reaching its climax.) But once again public opinion remained firmly with the President.

Indeed, the nature of the public's response to Bill Clinton's deeds should be a useful reminder of the differences between reality and fiction: For most Americans, the Lewinsky

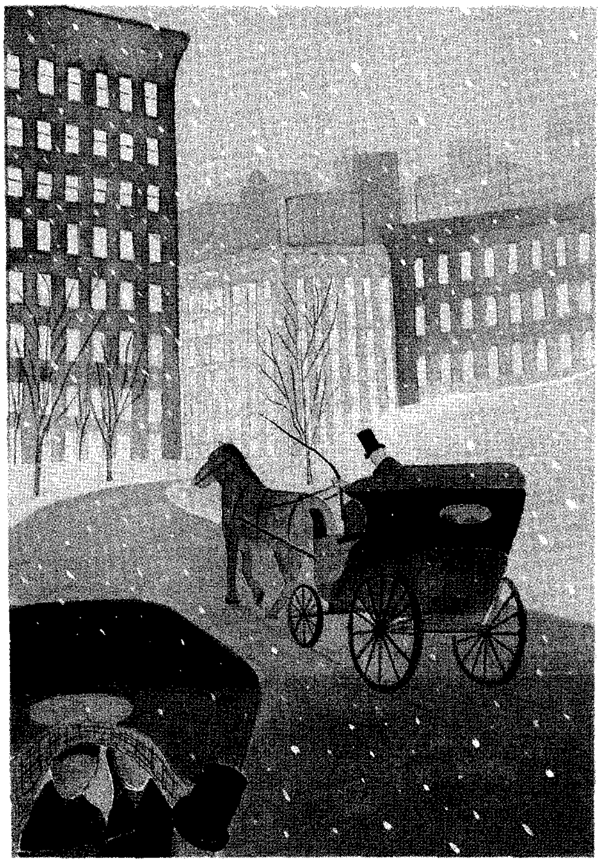
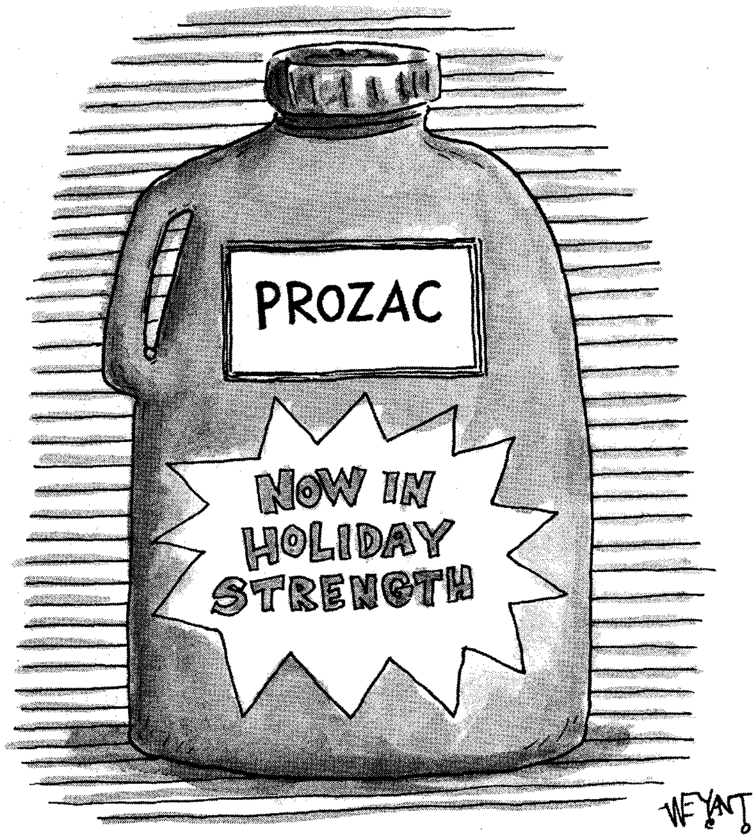


ILLUSTRATION BY GEOFFREY PARKER



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scandal has been an embarrassment, not an allegory. The President had an extramarital relationship and lied about it. Clinton's evasions were smarmy but not—as the lawyers might say—"actionable." The ensuing Republican and media efforts to inflate this pathetic private act into a constitutional crisis have been perceived by most Americans as a combination of politics and entrapment. For the public, there has been no subsequent plot development. The facts of the case are precisely what they were assumed to be last January. The characters haven't grown or developed; if anything, they have diminished. The "story" was titillating but brief: it was a gossip item, not a saga.

All that remains is nausea, the sense of shame for what was once grandly called public life. For in Washington it just keeps going on, like one of those boring existential exercises in dramaturgy where the characters are trapped within their fates and nothing happens. Opening the impeachment debate, Henry Hyde, the House Judiciary Committee chairman, summons not just the Constitution but Mosaic law, Roman law, and the Magna Carta. This is not even creative absurdity; it is banality of the most dispiriting sort. They must go on, they can't go on, they'll go on.

—JOE KLEIN

INK

New transcripts help explain what made Linda Tripp do it.

It will be years before historians have sorted out all the motives of the unlikely characters who helped pilot Bill Clinton toward impeachment, but the House Judiciary Committee quietly released a couple of new documents recently that begin to tell the tale. Transcripts of two early telephone conversations between the New York literary agent Lucianne Goldberg and Linda Tripp demonstrate that, regardless of the efforts of Tripp and her attorney to make it appear otherwise, the outing of Monica Lewinsky began as a high-stakes publishing enterprise.

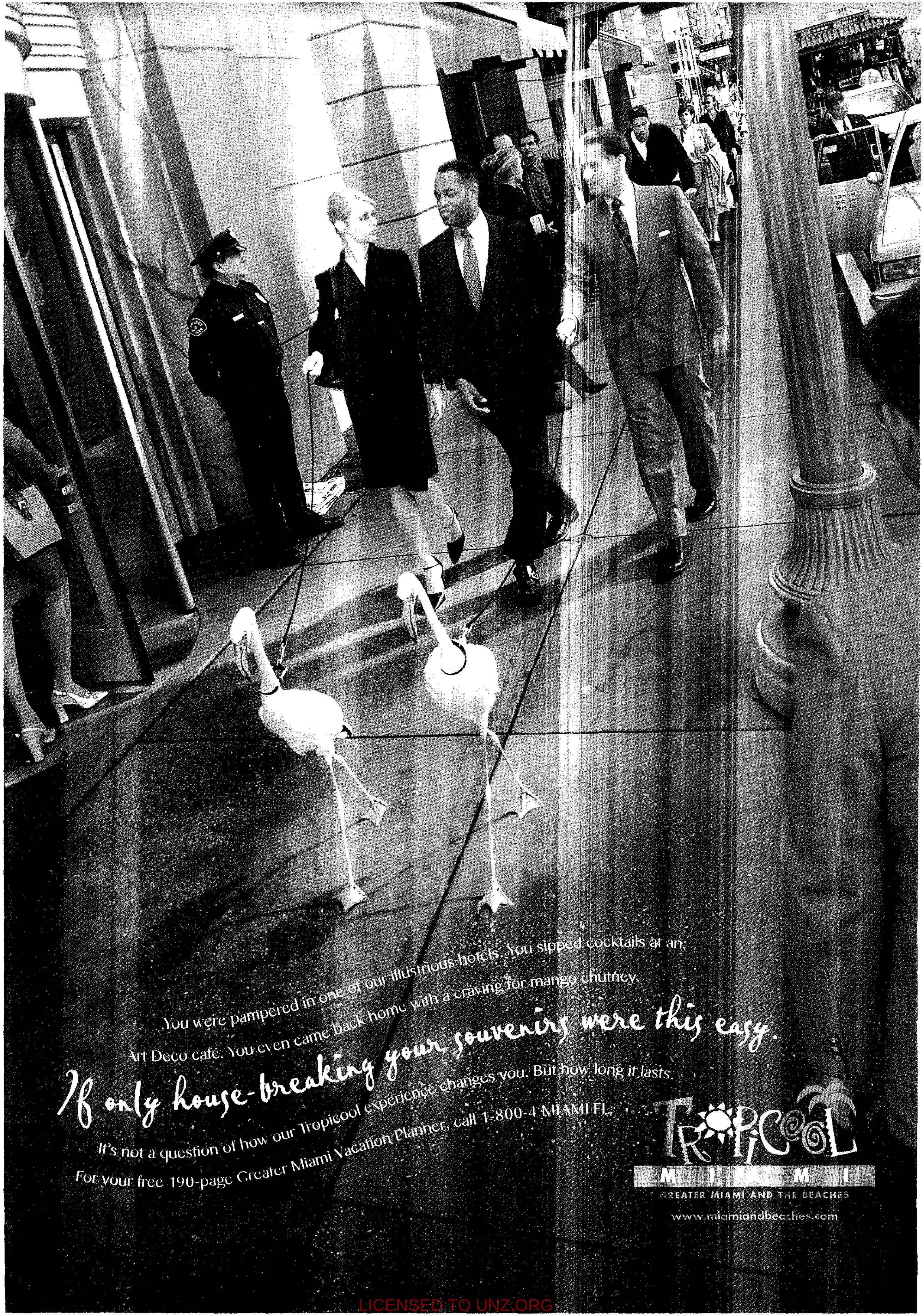
Tripp has tried hard over the past year to conceal her interest in writing a book. On July 12th, her attorney, Anthony Zaccagnini, told NBC's Tim Russert, "To say that Linda contemplated a book deal . . . about what she knew about Monica Lewinsky is absolutely untrue." Tripp herself told the grand jury, under oath, that she and Goldberg "never discussed putting Monica in a book." She did acknowledge an earlier attempt to write a tell-all White House book with Goldberg's help, and also admitted that "if I had had a year, I most likely would have taken that route again." But, under repeated questioning from skeptical grand jurors, Tripp insisted that a book was "not what we were looking to do. . . . When I threw away the book idea in August of '96, I was completely finished with it."

Tripp testified that she had taped Lewinsky only to protect herself from possible entanglement in the President's legal problems. She took detailed notes on Lewinsky's encounters with the President, she said, only because her friend had asked her to. "If I thought I was going to publish a book," she testified, "I would have been taking pictures. . . . I would have been documenting this relationship."

But the transcripts released by the Judiciary Committee seem to contradict these assertions. This time, Goldberg was doing the taping, secretly recording conversations she had with Tripp about Lewinsky in September of 1997. In the transcripts, Goldberg, who had lost patience with Tripp a year earlier, after Tripp decided to put aside her book project, sounds wary at first, but becomes increasingly interested as Tripp tells her about writing down "dates, times and phone calls" relating to the President's trysts with a young friend of hers. Tripp goes on to say that she has "so much information, I think I'm just going to add it. . . . This is so much more explosive, it makes the other little thing"—a reference to the Kathleen Willey story, which she had included in her earlier book proposal—"you know, pale."

When Goldberg asks Tripp if she wants to write a book, Tripp sounds uncertain, but then says that she has already been trying to rewrite her earlier book proposal: she says she "started from scratch and had come up with a whole different spin."

Goldberg then advises Tripp to leak the Lewinsky affair to Michael Isikoff,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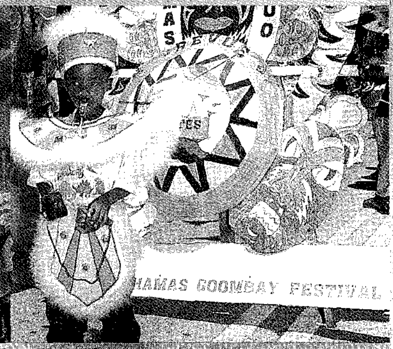

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The following are just a sampling of the Tropicool events going on in Greater Miami and the Beaches during the summer. For a complete 1999 Calendar of Events, visit our website at www.miamiandbeaches.com.

JANUARY 1999

ART DECO WEEKEND (Jan. 15-18) — Step back in time to the Jazz Age and celebrate Tropical Art Deco at its finest with live big bands, Art Deco artifacts and antiques, walking, bicycleand trolley tours, lectures, street theater and special events. For more information, call 305/672-2014.

48TH ANNUAL BEAUX ART FESTIVAL (Jan. 23-24) — Features 250 juried artists, including watercolor, print, jewelry, ceramic, glass and wood artists from throughout the country. For more information, call 305/444-9466.

16TH ANNUAL TASTE OF THE GROVE (Jan. 23-24) — Samples from Coconut Grove's finest restaurants, chef demonstrations, and rock and jazz performers. For more information, call 305/444-7270.

FEBRUARY 1999

ROYAL CARIBBEAN CLASSIC (Feb. 1-7) Senior Professional Golf Association Tour players compete for $850,000 in this golf classic, sponsored by Royal Caribbean Cruise Line. Thisevent kicks off the Senior PGA Tour season. For more information, call 305/365-0365.

MIAMI INTERNATIONAL BOAT SHOW (Feb. 11-17) — Expanded exhibit areas and exciting new features highlight this internationally acclaimed event, with three sites of the latest boats and marine accessories. New activities include a custom boat builders section, free boat rides on a variety of craft, and an expanded sailboat exhibition located on nearby Watson Island. For more information, call 305/531-8410.

COCONUT GROVE ARTS FESTIVAL (Feb. 13-15) — As one of the finest art festivals in the country, this event attracts more than 850,000 art lovers. Features fine arts and crafts by more than 300 of the most acclaimed and innovative local and international artists, a diverse array of international foods, and top jazz and contemporary performing artists. For more information, call 305/447-0401.

16TH MIAMI FILM FESTIVAL (Feb. 19-28) Recognized as one of the leading international film festivals by filmmakers, critics and the film industry. The festival is considered a unique event because of its consistency in quality programming, size and the diversity of its audience. Features the most exciting, newly released international feature films, movie shorts, animated films and documentaries, including many world and U.S. premiere showings. For more information, call 305/662-6960.

DORAL-RYDER OPEN (Feb. 27-Mar. 7) — Top golfers on the PGA Tour tackle the famed Blue Monster. A fun-filled week of entertainment including a Concert on the Green, Pro-Ams, a Skins Game and four days of competition by the pros for $1.8 million in prize money. For more information, call 305/365-0290.

MARCH 1999

CARNAVAL MIAMI (Mar. 5-14) — Miami's Latin flavor takes center stage for this major annual celebration which includes Carnaval Night in the Orange Bowl featuring the biggest names in Latin entertainment, Carnaval South Beach, Carnaval International and Calle Ocho, attracting more than one million people. For more information, call 305/644-8888.

MARLBORO GRAND PRIX OF MIAMI (Mar. 12-14) — Features the PPG CART World Series season opener. Includes world-renowned racers such as Al Unser Jr., Michael Andretti and Bobby Rahal. For more information, call 305/230-5214.

LIPTON CHAMPIONSHIPS (Mar. 18-28) — The fifth largest international tennis tournament in the world at the Tennis Center on Key Biscayne features the world's top men and women competing for $4.45 million. RADO speed serve contest, Lipton Tea Time Golf Distancer, Bacardi Sandbar, Mike's Heineken Pub and NIKE P.L.A.Y. Ground all make this annual event a sports spectacular. For more information, call 305/446-2200.

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Florida Grand Opera – 305/854-1643
Miami City Ballet – 305/532-4880
New World Symphony – 305/673-3331

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the *Newsweek* reporter who had broken earlier "bimbo" stories. "Oh, I could do that in a minute," Tripp responds, "but then he'd write the book."

Goldberg suggests that she and Tripp make a deal with Isikoff: her plan is to give him "just enough documentation for you to do the story, but the rest of it belongs to Linda because she's doing a book. . . . The trick would be to get it out there just enough to titillate the public." Later, she adds, "We can make a deal with Isikoff that protects you totally, that gets the surface of this out, and then you stand back to fill in the pieces, and I get you a publisher who will be happy to do that."

In the midst of this discussion, according to the transcripts, Tripp announces, "I'm ready to go!"

Isikoff, in Tripp's view, was happy to help out. In a transcript of another call, Tripp tells Goldberg about a phone conversation she had with Isikoff: the *Newsweek* reporter, Tripp says, warned her that "in the present climate" he doubted that she would find a publisher, unless, as she recalled his saying, "I were to, uh, work with you, and, you know, allow some of this to get out into the mainstream media." Isikoff, who went by the code name "Harvey" when dealing with Tripp, declines to comment other than to say that he does not remember the specific conversation Tripp recounts.

Goldberg is even more optimistic about Tripp's prospects, assuring her that finding a publisher will not be difficult: "The attitude now in publishing . . . even [among] the liberals that were pro-Clinton [is] 'We don't give a shit.' Nobody cares about him anymore."

In one of their talks, however, Goldberg does caution Tripp about a pitfall of publishing—the effect of the disclosure on Monica Lewinsky. "This will destroy her," the agent warns, later adding, "You have to be ready to lose her as a friend."

"Oh," replies Tripp, "I'm that. I have already made this decision."

Unfortunately for Tripp, events moved more quickly than she did. The story got out before she could get it down on paper. Now the six-figure sums that she and Goldberg once dreamily discussed are more likely to appear on her legal bills than on a check from a publishing house.

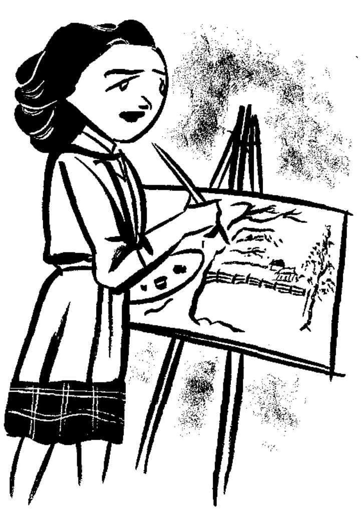
—JANE MAYER

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

HIDDEN TALENTS DEPT.

Who was the real Sybil? The New York Antiques Show holds the key.

DURING the upcoming New York Antiques Show, anyone with an interest in so-called outsider art should make his way over to Pier 92, where the firm of Parrett/Lich is selling twenty-seven paintings by the most famous unknown artist in America. Priced between a thousand dollars and thirty-five hundred, the paintings are proficient, although not particularly distinguished. What *is* striking, however, is their stylistic range—eerie gray cityscapes, dreamy watercolors, surreal melting forests—a range so broad as to suggest that they are the work of several artists rather than just one. And in a sense they are, since the artist in question is Shirley Mason, who is better known to the world as Sybil.



Shirley Mason, a.k.a. "Sybil"

That the identity of the woman who once claimed she possessed sixteen distinct personalities could remain secret until now is a testament to the dedication of her longtime guardians: her psychoanalyst, Dr. Cornelia Wilbur, who died in 1992, and Flora Rheta Schreiber, the author of the best-selling 1973 book "Sybil," who died ten years ago. Although the book portrays doctor and patient as parting ways after a dramatic breakthrough which ended Sybil's eleven-year analysis, in fact Mason trailed her analyst when she moved away from New York. Both eventually settled in Lexington, Kentucky, where Mason died this past February, at the age of seventy-five.

Together, the three women are responsible for shaping the modern notion of multiple personality disorder (M.P.D.), and "Sybil"—whose royalties they split three ways—became the movement's bible. Before 1973, there were fewer than fifty known cases of M.P.D.; by 1995, more than forty thousand had been diagnosed, prompting skepticism in the mental-health field. As the controversy over M.P.D. has grown, "Sybil" has come under scrutiny, and the search for Sybil herself intensified. In April, 1997, Dr. Herbert Spiegel, a New York analyst who had also treated Sybil, told *The New York Review of Books* that she was not a multiple personality but merely a suggestible hysteric. In August, Dr. Robert Reiber, a psychologist at John Jay College, used tapes of conversations between Wilbur and Schreiber to argue that "Sybil" was a fraud. "It is clear from Wilbur's own words that she was not exploring the truth but rather planting the truth as she wanted it to be," he wrote.

It is not until now, however, that Sybil's identity has finally come to light. Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, a professor of comparative literature at the University of Washington, and Peter Swales, a critic who has gained notoriety for digging up the true names of many of Freud's early patients, set out last spring to discover the truth about Sybil's life. Swales noticed that in Schreiber's book the doctor in Sybil's small Midwestern home town has a Hispanic pseudonym, Dr. Quinones. "As with Freud, I always assume that there is at least a tenuous connection between the true facts and a fabrication," he told me. In September, 1998, after searching the medical registry for Hispanic physicians in similar towns during the nineteen-twenties, he found a Dr. Otoniel Flores, who had practiced in Dodge Center, Minnesota.

A call to the Dodge County Historical Society solved the case with surprising speed. "Are you familiar with a woman painter born around 1923, whose grandfather was a sawmill owner with a wooden leg, whose father was a carpenter with a crippled hand, and whose mother may have been emotionally disturbed?" Swales asked an elderly clerk at the society. "Are you talking about Sybil, by any chance?" the clerk replied. Swales was stunned. Sybil's identity, a mystery to the rest of the world, had been an open secret in Dodge Center.

What's more, Swales and Borch-Jacobsen were not the only ones who had managed to unmask Sybil. In 1995, a Lexington antique collector named Mark Boultinghouse bought a number of paintings by an artist he knew as Shirley Mason. When Mason died, her executor offered Boultinghouse the rest of the estate's art. On examining the paintings, he noticed that one canvas had "Property of Dr. Cornelia Wilbur" stamped on the back. Boultinghouse had heard Wilbur lecture on the subject of multiple personality and was aware of her connection to Sybil. He compared the paintings with the illustrations of Sybil's art work in his copy of Schreiber's book, and saw that they were nearly identical.

Once Boultinghouse had established Mason's identity as Sybil, he sold forty-six of her paintings to the Parrett/Lich firm, which, in turn, decided to show them at the New York Antiques Show. In the meantime, Swales and Borch-Jacobsen, who are now collaborating on a documentary called "Sybil: Who's Who?," learned of the paintings, and Swales will be visiting the show. "As art, the paintings aren't anything really so special," Rod Lich, the firm's co-owner, told me. "But as Sybil's art they're pretty interesting." It is a judgment with which Mason would no doubt have agreed. "They ought to be worth quite a lot," Wilbur once quoted Sybil as saying, "because the artist no longer exists."

—ROBERT S. BOYNTON

RAG TRADE

Don't even think of giving a dog a bone in Manhattan.

IF luxury retailers are to be believed, the most important individual on the Christmas lists of many New Yorkers this year is not the spouse, the boss, the paramour, or even the child. It's the dog. "First, there were trophy wives, then there were trophy children—now it's trophy dogs," David Feld, an editor at large at *House & Garden*, explained the other day.

Spending on the family dog seems to have crossed one of those invisible social and financial barriers three or so years ago, around the time socialites and celebrities stopped taking small children to parties and began bringing tiny dogs instead. Suddenly, designers realized that dog products were, well, not very good-looking. Sheila Parness, a British designer whose pet products are available exclusively at Bergdorf Goodman, explained, "I had a lot of eighteenth-century furniture, and you couldn't very well put any old dog bed with it." Gucci's Tom Ford clearly had the same thing in mind when he began advertising his fifteen-hundred-dollar dog bed last fall. Like so many of his designs, it has a retro seventies look, made, as it is, of somewhat problematic clear Plexiglas. ("It's designed for an animal without claws, teeth, or a tongue," *House & Garden's* Feld noted.) Gucci's pet-accessories line now includes everything from goatskin throws backed in wool and cashmere to leather collars and dog brushes, all of which are handmade in Italy. (He has also created a line for cats.)

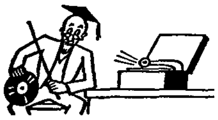
Ford has a lot of competition these days. Along with Hermès and Burberry, Vuitton sells a leather-trimmed canvas dog carrier that retails for around eight hundred and fifty dollars and has become as popular with rap stars as with face-lifted ladies. "The last person I saw with it was Foxy Brown," a Vuitton employee told me. Hip home stores like Portico have picked up the Wagwear line of pet products, designed by Amy Kizer, a former model. These include foul-weather dog gear, such as the "neoprene scuba suit with reflective trim." A relative bargain, at seventy-eight dollars for the small size, it is "not only fashionable but functional," Kizer says. She's quick to add, however, that the getup is "not really waterproof in the sense of getting in the water."

Bash Dibra, a New York-based animal behaviorist who has many Manhattan patients, has no particular objection to the trend in pet luxury goods. "Why not? You can't measure money with love," he said. But does a dog—unlike, say, a spoiled mistress or child—always know the difference between a designer item and an ordinary one? "Technically, no," Dibra said. "But neither do we."

—MIMI SWARTZ

DEPT. OF ŒUVRES

Rating the season's music boxes.

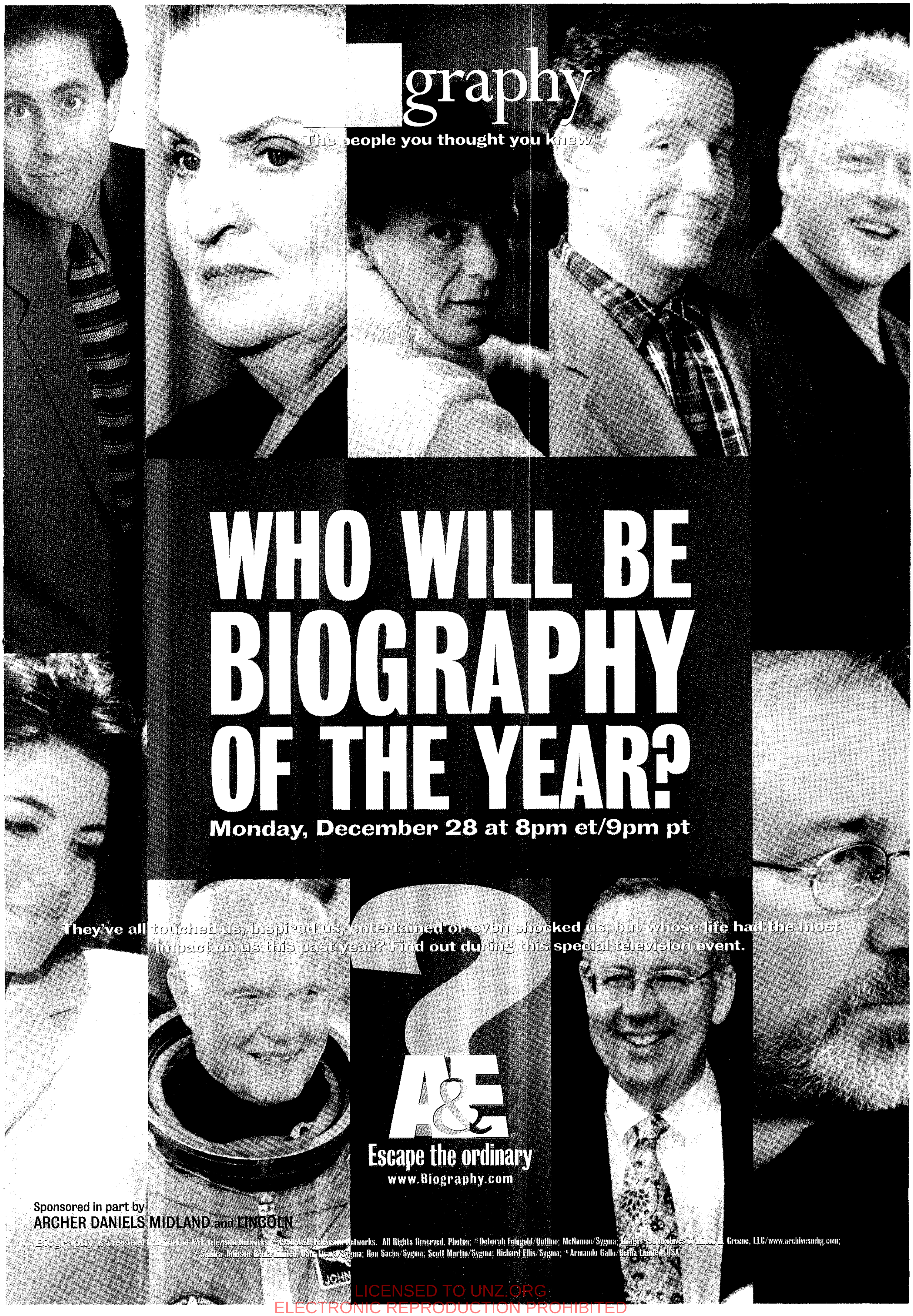


AS they cruise the Christmas-crowded aisles of the city's HMVs and Tower Records, the true music aficionados, the steely year-rounders, glance suspiciously at those bulky inventions of gift-marketing professionals, the boxed sets. For the aficionado, the boxed set reeks of the parvenu. How can you really respect a person who comes along at century's end and steps up to the register to buy the complete works of the Monkees or Monk, the complete Mahler symphonies or all of Hank Williams and James Brown? The belatedness of it! The pitiful lack of distinctions, of knowing nothing of alternate cuts or of Bernstein's Mahler versus Haitink's versus Solti's!

BEST OF
GREATEST HITS

And yet, aficionadi, be of good cheer. 'Tis the season. Admit to an interesting harvest this year, especially on the rock-and-roll front, for it is here that the boxed set can be a revelatory object (the new collected Queen excepted). The box is a useful entombment. No popular music can stay au courant for very long. The choice is either to flower fast and die beautiful (the credo of punk, *pace* the boxed Sex Pistols and Clash) or to make a stab at permanence. Robert Johnson now is at rest in his own boxed sets, proof that the cutting edge of a moment can be repackaged decades later and established as a classic. And why not? We all end up just so—in a box.

The two big boxes of the season, one from Bruce Springsteen, the other from John Lennon, are gestures in this ambitious direction. The Boss's collection is a fan's gift: outtakes, audition tapes, some good songs gone inexplicably missing. Lennon's four-disk "Anthology" is a squat sky-blue-with-clouds cube that looks like a happy child's bedroom. Although there is



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much that is familiar on the four disks, there's also a great deal of rec-room clowning, solo experimenting, and home recording, and even a basso parody of Paul McCartney's "Yesterday," which has the effect of the eternally naughty altar boy mocking the eternally solemn vicar. "Anthology" is the uneven but joyous product of a mature man bridling against his celebrated youth and doing finally what he wants.

"One has to completely humiliate oneself to be what the Beatles were, and that's what I resent," Lennon is quoted as saying in the accompanying booklet. "I mean I did it, I didn't know, I didn't foresee; it just happened bit by bit, gradually, until this complete craziness is surrounding you and you're doing exactly what you don't want to do with people you can't stand, the people you hated when you were ten."

Lennon's and Springsteen's sets are, like it or not, footnotes to the main career. A more typical product, but the one that is surely the triumph of the music-box season, is the oblong four-disker "Guilty: 30 Years of Randy Newman." You might not care much for the film scores outside the theatre, or even for the more obvious rollicking hits ("Short People" became a little familiar), but there is so much wit and irony here, so much political acid and creaky sadness, that it's amazing that Newman is not more celebrated than he is. Of all the singer-songwriters of his era, he is the most skilled as a composer and arranger (Tin Pan Alley mixes with Aaron Copland) and the most convincing as the guy-alone-at-the-piano-after-last-call. "Marie," that boozed-up two-verse lament, breaks the heart:

> The song the trees sing when the wind
>   blows,
> You're a flower, you're a river, you're a
>   rainbow.
> Sometimes I'm crazy, but I guess you
>   know,
> I'm weak and I'm lazy, and I hurt you so.
> And I don't listen to a word you say,
> When you're in trouble, I turn away.
> But I love you, I loved you the first time
>   I saw you.
> And I always will love you, Marie.

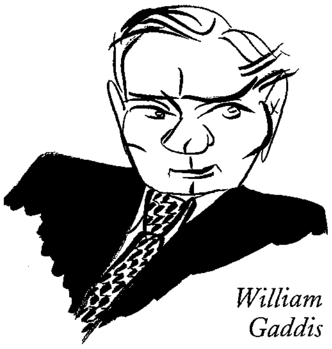
It's the song of the missed chance, of the self-lacerating fool, of love gone wrong—a happy holiday song now neatly boxed for eternity and the holiday shopper. —DAVID REMNICK

POSTSCRIPT

Recalling a hard life's work.

"LIKE most American novelists, Willie didn't have any grounding in belief of any kind," the critic Frederick Karl said of his friend William Gaddis, who died on December 16th. "He was alone, no religious revival, no reaching for spiritual salvation. Irony became his fallback position, his world view. He found everything artificial and deceptive and conspiratorial—counterfeit. That was his great theme." After all, as Gaddis himself once remarked, "Stupidity—and I don't mean ignorance—is a central issue of our time."

The first sentence of Gaddis's first novel, "The Recognitions," which focusses on art forgery, announced his abiding concern, describing "that critical moment" in a masquerade when the mask "presumes itself as reality." Upon the novel's publication, in 1955, it was savaged by reviewers. "What this sprawling, squalling, overwritten book needs above all," one wrote, "is to have its mouth washed out with lye soap." Sales, too, were lousy. Years later, Karl said, Gaddis "used to joke that there was just one copy of his book circulating among all his readers."



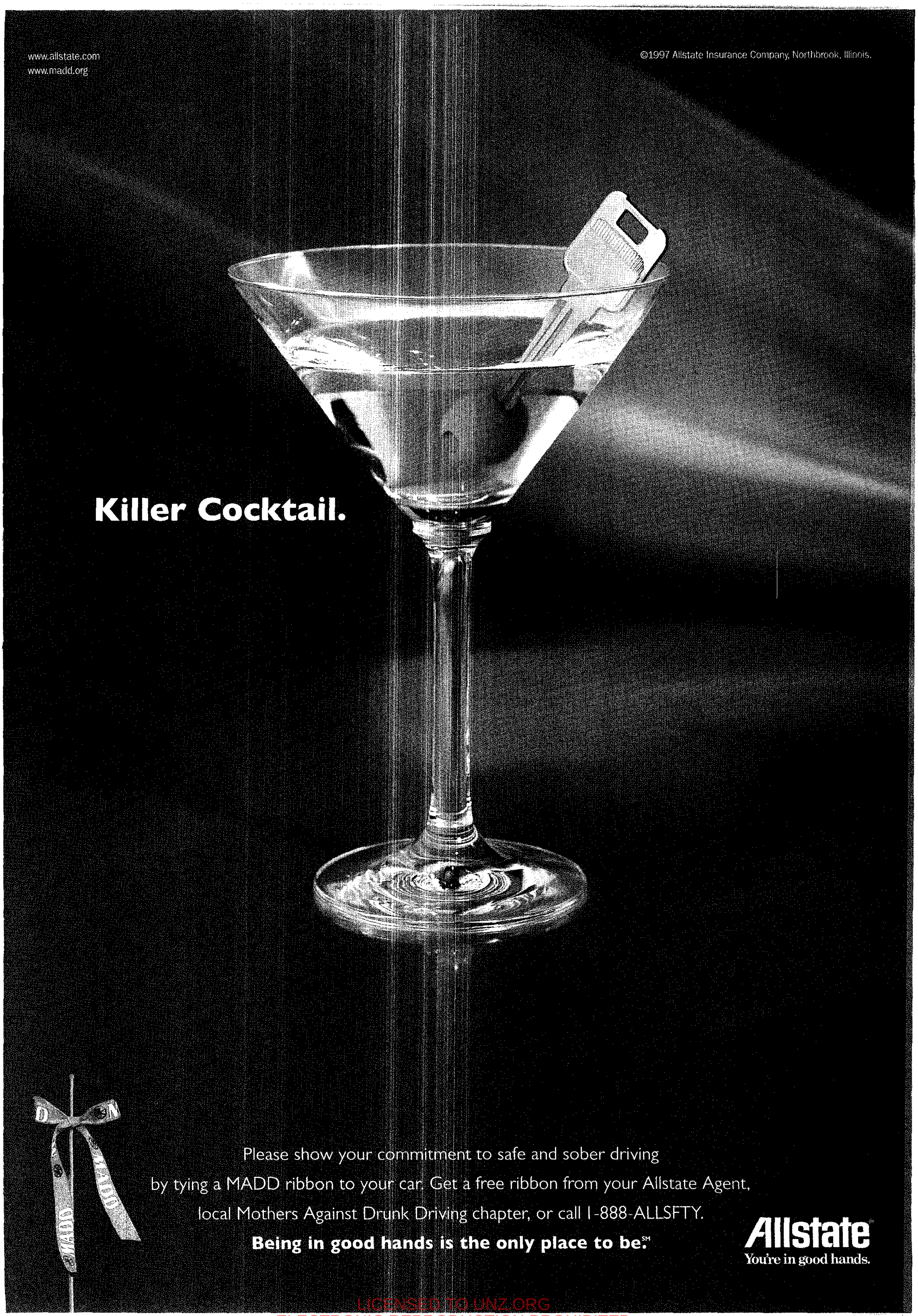
William Gaddis

It was not until 1975 that Gaddis published his next novel, "J.R.," a saga of financial fraud, which was followed in 1985 by "Carpenter's Gothic," which took on religious charlatanism, and in 1994 by "A Frolic of His Own," which confronted the mystifications of the legal profession. With these volumes, he garnered, among other honors, two National Book Awards, a MacArthur "genius" grant, and election to the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. By the time of his death, he was widely recognized to be as inventive, perceptive, and intelligent a novelist as America has produced in this century. He was also one of the funniest—a writer of ideas with a wickedly keen ear for the way ideas are folded, spindled, and mutilated in American speech. "Keep an open mind your brains will fall out," one character says in "Carpenter's Gothic." "When people stop lying that's when you know they've stopped caring," says another.

Candida Donadio, who was Gaddis's literary agent until last year, says, "I think he thought God was a terrible joke." (In a characteristic aside, in "The Recognitions," Gaddis writes, "The Irish mathematician Sir William Rowan Hamilton calculates that Jesus in assumption, being drawn up through space at a moderate rate, would not yet have reached the nearest of the fixed stars.") Frederick Karl said, "He was full of edges, and not an easy man. It was an American life. He was a hard-drinking, hard-smoking writer with money problems." Friends describe Gaddis's economic circumstances as ranging, through his life, from bad to not much better. Among the many jobs he took to support his writing life was a stint teaching at Bard College, where he offered a course on the literature of American failure. He hoped the topic would scare away students, Karl said, but this ploy was itself a failure; the course was overenrolled. Gaddis took pleasure in dressing in elegant bespoke suits and English tweeds purchased in thrift shops. Karl described the home where he spent his last years, in East Hampton, as exceedingly modest: "This great writer was living there in this ramshackle place a little step up from the Unabomber's hut."

Gaddis, a starkly handsome man with mandarin bearing, never allowed his portrait to appear on the dust jackets of his novels. Nor did he care to talk to the press about his writing. He wanted nothing to do with what he called "the tendency I've observed of putting the man in the place of his work." When he made an exception, sitting for an interview with *The Paris Review*, he quoted from a character in his first novel: "This passion for wanting to meet the latest poet, shake hands with the latest novelist, get hold of the latest painter . . . What is it they want from a man that they didn't get from his work? What do they expect? What is there left of him when he's done his work? What's any artist, but the dregs of his work?"

—PHILIP GOUREVITCH



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WINTER TALE

THE GOOD STALIN

Wine, caviar, and a life of Politburo privilege.

BY VICTOR EROFEYEV

I WAS born in the fall of 1947, and was named in honor of the recent triumph over Germany. My childhood was a happy one—not unlike that of Vladimir Nabokov, except that my paradise was purely Stalinist.

My father worked at the Kremlin as a translator and interpreter. When I was driven past there as a child, in the winter, on the way to Gorky Park with my friends—all of us wrapped in scarves, sheepskin coats, caps, and felt boots, and carrying little spades for digging in the snow—I would declare proudly, "That's where my Papa and Comrade Stalin work."

Papa was an invisible being. People who worked for Stalin often returned home at dawn. In the mornings, I'd run to my parents' bedroom to try to watch him sleep, but I was never allowed in. On Sundays and holidays, he would suddenly materialize—a young man with gray eyes and a slanting lick of hair. He often brought home parcels, wrapped in blue paper, from the Kremlin commissary: crunchy sausages, the best Doktorskaya salami, smoked pork, salmon, cured sturgeon, crabs, halvah, and a pale-pink fruit paste known as *pastila*. Dark-red blotches sometimes appeared on the paper wrappings: steak filets oozing blood. Even now, I can remember the smell of pimpled green gherkins, with their yellow flowers still attached. We'd eat them in the depths of winter, when the kitchen window was patterned with ferns of frost. Half of Moscow was starving, but in our house we swore by the gourmet cookbook "Delicious Healthy Food," with its elegant sepia photographs of culinary abundance—oven-roasted suckling pigs and fine wines from Georgia. I was thin, and I often didn't like my food. To stimulate my appetite, my grandmother resorted to the stinking torture of cod-liver oil. Once, she called Mama at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where she worked, with an ecstatic report on my breakfast: "Vityusha ate a whole jar of black caviar!"

Our life was in every way a life of privilege: each year a bespoke suit, cut from imported English cloth, was given to Papa free of charge; our building and hallways were always clean and safe (Comrade Vlasik, an all-powerful commander of Stalin's guard, lived on the same staircase as us); when we were ill, we went to a clinic run by smiling doctors; we received tickets to any theatrical performance we wanted; at New Year's we attended parties at the Kremlin; and at the select Novodevichy Cemetery there were even plots reserved in our names.

The world was full of good, solid things: torches, skyscrapers, Moscow Metro stations, and park benches with curved backs, on one of which, in wind and snow one winter, our maid Marusya and I conducted a chess tournament. The chessmen were up to their waists in drifts. I was recovering from whooping cough. Marusya, laughing, wiped her nose with a torn mitten. We both missed moves, confused rooks and kings. Sometimes, in tears, I threw pawns and knights at Marusya, then fished them out of the slush. Slowly, I learned to lose.

Once, to my great joy, Papa took me, alone, to our dacha in the country. We travelled on a suburban train, pulled by a red-wheeled locomotive that emitted particularly luscious smoke. Papa was wearing his diplomatic uniform, which bore a general's markings of rank. When we stepped onto our village platform, he sat down to tie his shoelace. He leaned back for a second and dozed off. A railway policeman appeared and stood silently beside my father. Worried that we were in some kind of trouble, I began to cry—quietly, so the policeman wouldn't notice. Suddenly, Papa's cap slipped off his head and he woke with a start, surprised to see the policeman.

"What are you doing here?" he asked crossly.

When I was driven past the Kremlin as a child, I would declare proudly, "That's where my Papa and Comrade Stalin work."

THOMAS ERNSTING, BILDERBERG/AURORA

"I am guarding your sleep, Comrade General!" the policeman said with a jaunty salute.

MY father had finished school in Leningrad, in 1937, top of his class in every subject. He wanted to travel, so he applied for jobs at the Railway Institute and the Arctic Institute. Then, when it occurred to him to go to Spain to fight as a volunteer in the cause of world revolution, he enrolled in the Spanish-language division of Leningrad State University.

"Comrade Erofeyev," Stalin asked him ten years later, in his private study, "where were you born?"

Stalin's accent was always thick, according to my father, and he made a lot of grammatical mistakes, so my father misheard his question.

"At Leningrad State University, Josef Vissarionovich."

"So you were born right in the university?"

The study, a huge, austere room, with a prominently displayed white plaster death mask of Lenin, was filled by a thick, harsh laugh. My father trembled with surprise. Stalin was laughing, holding his side, and saying, "You just kill me!"

In fact, my father told me years later, it was Stalin who nearly killed him. It was only by chance—thanks to a mysterious recurring bout of tonsillitis—that he wasn't in the wrong place at the wrong time. On March 12, 1939, he was ill, and had to stay in bed instead of attending a party that was being thrown by friends of his from the university to celebrate the birthday of a fellow-student, the poet Sergei Klyshko. Sergei had a comic gift, but he never knew when to stop joking. He'd tell funny stories and read poetry that was considered anti-Soviet. Someone must have sold him out, because the day after the party every single guest was arrested. The girls were soon released, but the boys were imprisoned for years: some endured broken ribs or lost a kidney. According to my father, Sergei was sentenced to "the big one."

AS an adult, my father was never ill. Being ill was considered a breach of discipline in the Kremlin secretariat, and Papa was a disciplined Communist. So I was surprised when I once saw him with a bandaged hand.

He had finished work unusually early that night, at about one in the morning, he explains now. "I returned home and had just jumped in the bath when your mother thumped on the door and informed me that I was being urgently summoned back to the Kremlin. Stalin's personal limousine picked me up and rushed me to the Spassky Gates. I passed the guard, raced up to the first floor of the government building, and hurried down the long narrow corridor. As I turned, I slipped on the icy parquet and cut my hand badly. I got up and hurriedly bandaged it with a handkerchief. At the end of the corridor stood Poskrebyshev, Stalin's chief aide, who cursed me for being so slow. He took me literally by the scruff of the neck and shoved me through a sliding door into Stalin's study."

In the study, my father told me, two delegations were sitting opposite each other at a long table: the home team—of Politburo members—and a foreign one. The Big Chief stood in the middle of the room with a pipe in his mouth. He motioned to my father to take his place at the head of the table. My father hid his injured hand under his notepad as Stalin padded to and fro in his soft boots behind him.

"Suddenly, Stalin stopped speaking," my father says. "He came up to me and, pointing to my handkerchief, asked, 'What's the matter with your hand?'

" 'Nothing, Josef Vissarionovich. I fell, it's nothing at all,' I mumbled."

"How did you fall? Where?"

At that moment, the door flew open

and in rushed a doctor with a bag and two assistants, all in a terrible state of agitation. On their heels came Poskrebyshev. Without anyone's noticing, Stalin had pressed a bell hidden by the table and signalled to the emergency medical service. There people had panicked, believing that something had happened to Stalin.

"See what's the matter with his hand," Stalin said quietly.

The doctor rushed up to my father and quickly washed and dressed his cut.

"You can go now," Stalin ordered.

Those present watched the scene in silence. The talks resumed.

The story of Papa's hand had a sequel. After the official reception, Stalin asked Prime Minister Molotov, "Tell me, why don't interpreters get state honors? After all, they sometimes work at the risk of their health."

Soon afterward, my father received his first major decoration: the order of the Red Banner of Labor.

MY father was summoned in 1944 to work as Molotov's assistant, and in this position he became an eyewitness to and conduit of Soviet war policy. He also took part in the drafting of many of Stalin's letters to Roosevelt and Churchill.

Molotov, by my father's description, was a desiccated and boring man, albeit an educated one. After the death of Stalin's chief ideologue, Andrei Aleksandrovich Zhdanov, Molotov was certainly the only member of the Politburo who could have stated with authority that Balzac had never written a novel called "Madame Bovary." He liked long country walks, ice-skated, drank Narzan mineral water with a slice of lemon, and adored buckwheat kasha.

"What do you know about the health value of kasha?" he once asked my father. "Find out and write me a report."

Like many Communists, Molotov had replaced his interest in immortality with a desire for longevity. But he showed an interest in more than buckwheat kasha. In 1947, there was a currency reform in the Soviet Union. One night, after eighteen months had passed, Molotov asked my father, "Do you happen to have any money on you?"

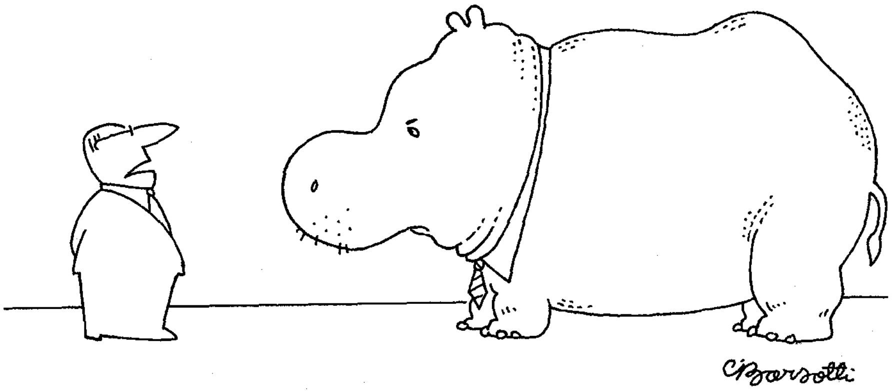
My father did. Molotov examined with interest the new bills.

"Nice-looking notes," he said, with approval.

My father's view was that Molotov was the only member of the Politburo whom Stalin respected. The others just carried out orders. Stalin and Molotov ruled together. All the questions arising in a highly centralized state—from matters of global concern to the cut of ladies' blouses—flowed up to them.

But in 1948 Stalin arrested Molotov's wife. It was something that Stalin did quite often: he'd arrest the wives of his closest associates—Kalinin, Poskrebyshev, to name two—and then wait for their husbands to plead for them. Poskrebyshev's plea was met with a jocular "We'll find you a wife who's a bit better." Molotov endured his wife's arrest, but by then he was beginning to resent Stalin. He would return from meetings in a mood of extreme irritation and vent his anger on his aides, calling them idiots and muddlers, and doling out reprimands.

The arrest of his wife was only the first blow Stalin levelled against Molotov. At the Nineteenth Party Congress, in October, 1952, Stalin accused him of spying, giving as his reason Molotov's concessions to the West. "After that," according to my father, "Molotov sat at his empty desk, looking through the Soviet newspapers and Tass bulletins. Other papers didn't get to him, and he was seldom summoned to Stalin. In the secretariat where we worked, the zealous business managers of the Ministry were already taking down the costly chandeliers and draperies."



"And yet, as we look at our lives, can't many of us say, 'My cubicle is too small'?"

AT first, I was surprised when my father told me that he had never been nervous in Stalin's presence. But then my father was not a member of the intelligentsia, most of whom were terrified, for good reason. He was a bureaucrat who existed as one of Stalin's extensions. He was a success in a world of people who had a particular group vision. They were permeated by the system and saw just what it wanted them to see. The ubiquitous mass terror of those years went mostly unnoticed in my family. It had "nothing to do with us." My parents didn't shrug it off, they didn't hide, they just didn't pay any attention to it.

In Papa's stories, Stalin appears in a light that is very different from the one now cast on him by history. This "good" Stalin had a touching passion for René Clair's film "Sous les Toits de Paris," and was full of modesty and camaraderie.

Over the years, when I have asked my father whether he liked Stalin, his answer has varied: affirmative at first, then increasingly awkward. But he has never given a negative answer. He saw in Stalin a magnetic personality on a world scale. "I don't think that Stalin was a political killer who derived pleasure from torture," he tells me now. "I can't make that accord with his actual presence. When I saw him for the first time, I was taken aback. His pitted face had an unhealthy, swarthy hue, the color of earth. His left hand hung with no movement in it. He lifted it with his other hand and placed it in his pocket. But, even sitting with my back to the door, I could sense when Stalin walked into the study. He filled the space and shut out everything else."

For a long time, I used to pester my father with the question "Did Stalin believe in Communism or was he just obsessed with power?" But he never gave me a definitive answer. Of the two opposing images of Stalin—the ascetic Grand Inquisitor, on the one hand, and the sadist and murderer he was thought to be by the Russian intelligentsia, on the other—my father is inclined, even today, to choose the former. He has never had time for the intelligentsia, partly because they always hated the ideologue Zhdanov—hated him in secret with a dull passion, for the destruction of even the semblance of rights, for the public pillorying of the writers Akhmatova and Zoshchenko—while in our family Zhdanov was honored as a savior.

When my grandparents were blockaded in Leningrad and couldn't get out of bed—they were starving, and their strength had given out—my father sent Zhdanov a plea for help. Within a few days, an officer appeared at their apartment door with a sack of food and wine.

In the early nineteen-fifties, my father became the subject of increased K.G.B. surveillance. Once, in the evening, a strange voice came over the *vertushka*—the official telephone—and rudely rebuked him for hiding behind a curtain when Comrade Stalin had passed along the corridor. Pure "Hamlet" fantasies. Another time, while he was on holiday in the south, he received a telegram ordering him back to Moscow. Our cleaning woman—a K.G.B. agent—had found in his study a postcard with Picasso's jubilee portrait of Stalin, which Beria, the head of the secret police, regarded as a caricature.

The death of Stalin, in 1953, clearly saved my father from the Gulag—and me from an orphanage for the offspring of the enemies of the people. Two years later, my father began to suffer from angina, and his work for Molotov came to an end. ("We were all kept healthy by the constant nervous strain, especially during the war," he told me once. "When life started to flow on a normal course, illnesses returned.")

We went to live in Paris, where my father had been appointed Counsellor at the Soviet Embassy. A few years later, Molotov was stripped of his offices, having been declared by Khrushchev the leader of a pro-Stalin "anti-Party" group. His private office was disbanded.

I grew up and came to understand that for the West and most of the Russian intelligentsia Stalin was one thing, but for millions of Russians he was something quite different. Many of them didn't believe in the "bad" Stalin who oppressed and tortured. They maintained instead the icon of the "good" Stalin, the savior of Russia and the father of a great nation. My father was one of those people.

My grandmother, Anastasiya Nikandrovna, was not. She had always maintained an appearance of support for Communist rule, but before her death my grandmother, who turned out to have a longer life than the U.S.S.R., admitted to me that she had always thought "the Leader"—Lenin—"a bad man."

"Why didn't you tell me that before?" I asked.

"I didn't want to ruin your life," she answered in a hoarse voice, resorting to drama.

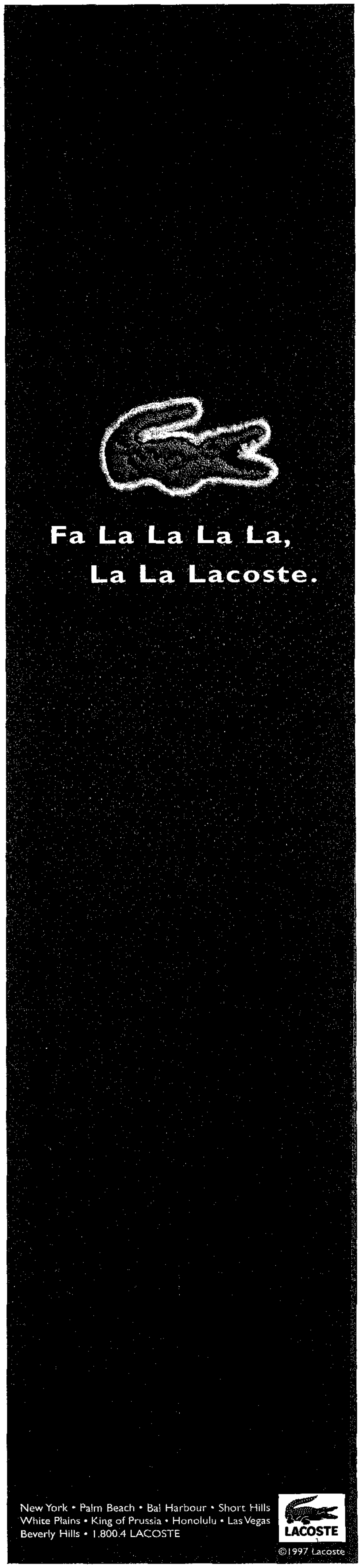
She didn't know that I had already ruined my own life, and my father's, without her help. I had seen the traps of the Soviet system from the inside and had refused to become a "Soviet writer." Instead, in 1979, living then in Moscow, I had launched the underground literary magazine *Metropole*, which published liberal and Russian dissident writers of all generations. Critics now credit the magazine with helping to put an end to Soviet literature as an integrated structure. At the time, my behavior was seen as a betrayal—of my country's ruling class, which was full of my father's peers and friends, and of my country. My works were banned. My father's response was heroic—he probably saved me from prison—but, as a result, he lost his job (he was then the Soviet Ambassador to Vienna) and was disgraced as the parent of a "decadent." We concealed this family catastrophe from my grandmother as if it were an embarrassing illness.

My father and I are sitting at the table in my childhood home, on the former Gorky Street (which was renamed Tverskaya during perestroika), drinking tea. The lights of American and Japanese advertisements flicker in the windows. The year 1998 is coming to an end.

"No one," my father says, "could convert a country to Communism by force. Russia at the time simply wasn't ready for it. Just as today we still aren't ready for democracy. But our experience hasn't been wasted."

I say nothing, remembering how during my childhood the table was always moved aside at New Year's and a fragrant fir tree that reached to the ceiling was placed in the corner. There has been an error in my education from the beginning: I still believe in Santa Claus more than I believe in Stalin. ♦

(*Translated, from the Russian, by Peter Carson.*)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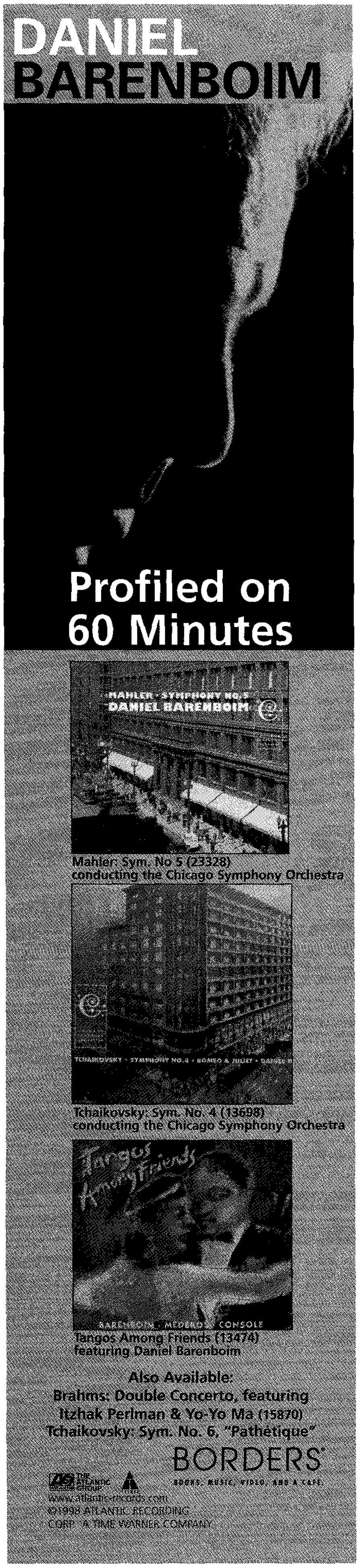
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PERSONAL HISTORY

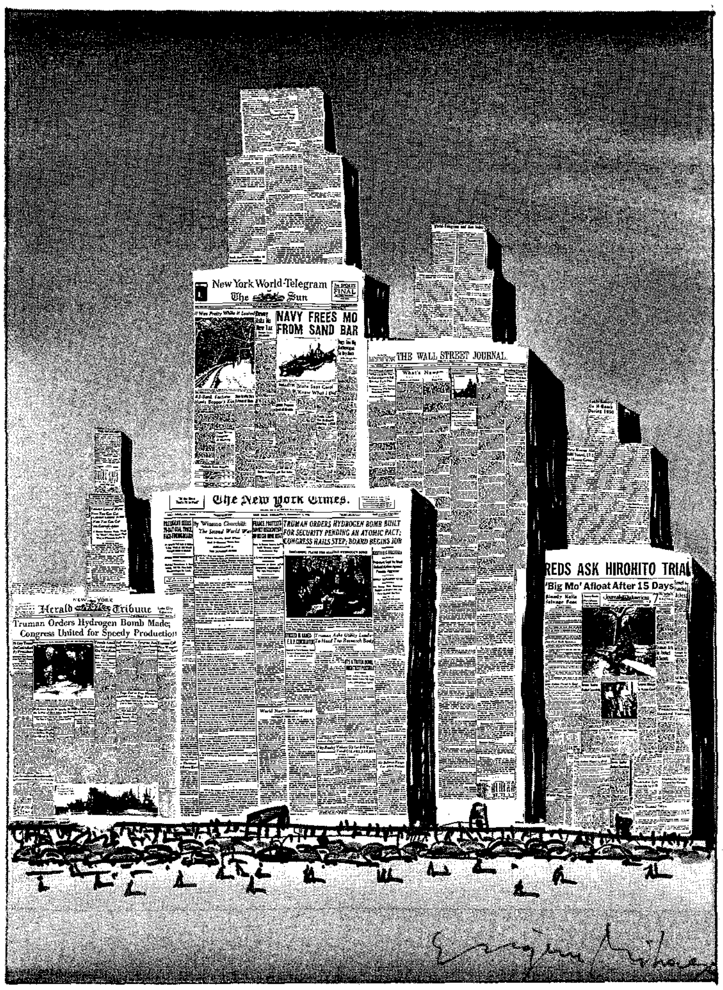
FOLDING THE TIMES

New York before television.

BY GEORGE W. S. TROW

THE NEW YORK NEWSPAPER

ONE of the things my father taught me when I was young which has proved almost useless is how to fold a folio newspaper, a large-format newspaper like the *Times*, so that it could be read in close quarters on the subway in New York. It was assumed that you would read a large-format newspaper, and that you'd be sitting close to your neighbors on the subway, and you had to know how to do it: how to follow the story over from page 1 to page 32, folding the newspaper while existing in a small, confined space. This skill—which I don't think I have anymore—resembled origami, Japanese paper folding. It really was fairly complicated. My father did it beautifully; he could read contentedly for an hour on the subway, folding and following and moving back and forth. In any case, the variety of what I'm calling the folio newspapers in New York in 1950 has been forgotten, and we have to remember that the television mind hadn't yet been formed; that the newspaper mind was dominant in New York City, and that, unquestionably, New York City, as it had been for some time, was the dominant city in the country as to culture, especially as to mass culture, certainly as to media.


New York World-Telegram
The Sun
NAVY FREES MO FROM SAND BAR
THE WALL STREET JOURNAL
The New York Times
TRUMAN ORDERS HYDROGEN BOMB BUILT
Herald Tribune
Truman Orders Hydrogen Bomb Made; Congress United for Speedy Production
REDS ASK HIROHITO TRIAL
'Big Mo' Afloat After 15 Days

In 1950, New York was a gray city, a masculine city, a serious place.

EUGÈNE MIHAESCO

Naturally, a moment matters. Was New York interesting in 1865? Of course it was: the city of Astor, Vanderbilt, and Washington Irving, say. In some ways, New York had never been more powerful than it was then. And on February 1, 1929? You bet: the rock-and-roll financial life, the booze, Broadway. To a large extent, we've been working our way back to that legendary electricity ever since. What of media life? Was it more intelligent in 1865 than in 1950? Well, yes. Was media life more frenetic, more charged with energy, on February 1, 1929, than it was twenty-one years later? Well, yes, it was. However, the moment—I mean the world moment—was different. In 1950, America was about to reach the height of her power. An interesting moment: Victoria assumes the throne, in a way; Napoleon is about to dismember the Holy Roman Empire, in a way. We were about to have our most pervasive influence. The world waited for what America would say, and paid attention to whatever America did say.

New York in 1950 was a gray city. From a boy's point of view, it was a masculine city, a maritime city, a serious place—shot through with a bit of pastel-feminine color. The newspapers then seemed to be the oracles of the city. They, too, were gray, and even the tabloids seemed serious—like a U.S.O. show. Even our entertainment—even our gossip—had a warrior vector; or so it seemed to me.

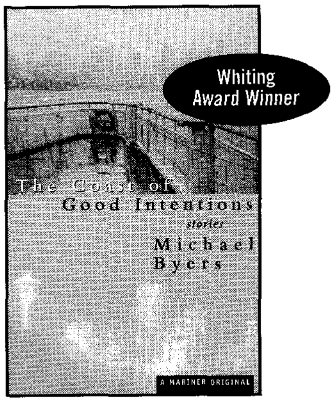
When I was seven, in 1950, I was told by my father that you couldn't be a real Trow without knowing how to read a newspaper. My father came from a brownstone New York family and had long been obsessed with Franklin Roosevelt. His grandmother, my great-grandmother, had been a brownstone Progressive dedicated to Theodore Roosevelt right into his Bull Moose days, and so by 1950 we were into our fiftieth year, more or less, of our family obsession with the Necessary Correctness of the Roosevelts. You may not know what the Black Nobility used to be in Rome. It's a vanished phenomenon, just as the phenomenon I am describing within my family is a vanished phenomenon. The Black Nobility was mostly descended from or related to the Italian popes, and it was felt within those families that a certain thread of church life was maintained only within those families; the thread, of course, was blood loyalty. It was all of a piece, my father indicated to me in the strongest terms: gentlemanliness, my family's history in New York City, New York City itself, the liberal arts—and the New York newspaper. My father had this notion, and he took it as Job 1 to pass it on to me. Not for me were any of the freedoms whose promises had drawn ordinary Americans into the Roosevelt fold. My job was to be Black Roosevelt—tinged so deep that no amount of change could change my color.

By the age of four, although I could not read, I knew what a headline was, what a lead story was, which columnists were respectable and which were not (I learned to loathe Westbrook Pegler before I was in kindergarten). I learned what the *Times* represented and what the *Daily News* represented, and the difference between the *News* and the *Mirror*, and who Old Man Hearst was, and what was wrong with Roy Howard (the head of the Scripps-Howard chain). I was told that not to read the *Times* was to condemn oneself to second-class citizenship. And I was told that the *Sun* was in trouble, and that our newspaper was the *Herald Tribune*.

In 1950, the *Herald Tribune* was continuous with what my father was saying Wasp civilization was. My grandmother, my father's mother, was a devotee of Clementine Paddleford, who wrote the food column; it was my grandmother's firm opinion that the only person writing for the public who could give you a really good recipe was Clementine Paddleford, and all through my childhood I ate spaghetti sauce made by my grandmother from Clementine Paddleford's recipe. We were, it is safe to say, in our souls a *Herald Tribune* family. But that was over, or was about to be over.

The *Herald Tribune* was Heartbreak House. It was losing readership and losing authority, and for no particular reason. That it didn't report the news as fully as the *Times* did was the obvious one, but my personal experience was that people who switched from the *Herald Tribune* to the *Times* in the nineteen-fifties did it for Zeitgeist reasons: they did it to escape Heartbreak House. The heaping feast of information in the *Times* was picked at, not read completely; the move was made because one wanted to associate oneself with the secular, scientific, factual approach of the *Times*. The *Herald Tribune* still reported the news a little in the spirit of one who

NEW YORK TIMES
NOTABLE BOOKS



THE COAST OF GOOD INTENTIONS
Michael Byers
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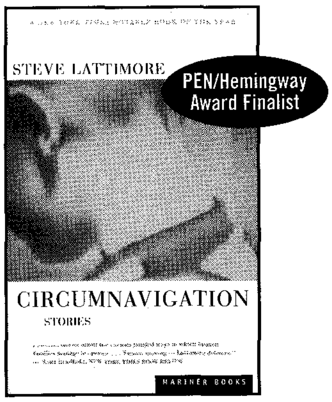

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A wife is in the grip of being.
Easy to say, Why not give up on this?
But let's suppose your husband and a certain dark woman
like to meet at a bar in early afternoon.
Love is not conditional.
Living is very conditional.
The wife positions herself in an enclosed veranda across the street.
Watches the dark woman
reach out to touch his temple as if filtering something onto it.
Watches him
bend slightly toward the woman then back. They are both serious.
Their seriousness wracks her.
People who can be serious together, it goes deep.
They have a bottle of mineral water on the table between them
and two glasses.
No inebriants necessary!
When did he develop
this puritan new taste?
A cold ship

moves out of harbor somewhere way inside the wife
and slides off toward the flat gray horizon,

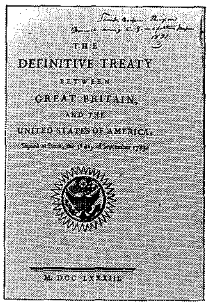
not a bird not a breath in sight.

—Anne Carson

had seen you at St. James Church on Sunday, of someone who was suspicious of Mammon and was reluctant to give you sensational information of any kind, lest it damage your soul.

I didn't like the *World-Telegram* (as of January, 1950, it became the *World-Telegram & Sun*). There was a deadness around that paper. It was the paper read by a certain kind of person working in the advertising business, or on Wall Street. Such people read the *World-Telegram* pretty thoroughly. It wasn't like the *Herald Tribune*. There was no fine and pretty stuff from old-time Waspdom, and there wasn't the endless factuality and relative high-mindedness of the *Times*. The *World-Telegram* was for Wasps who understood that their education and their background were dominance weapons.

The *Journal-American* was read by the people who were moving toward a dominant position in the culture—the Irish and also the Italians, the Roman Catholics of the city. They wanted to be appealed to, and coaxed, and beguiled, and they wanted some piece of information from previous avatars of the dominant culture. There was a bit of what we'll call real social authority in the *Journal-American*, and it came in two parts: Broadway-Hollywood and Café Society. The *Journal-American*, in part because of its link through ownership with William Randolph Hearst, who was one of the gaudiest creatures of this century, reported something like the real deal in those two departments. It wasn't going to offend Mr. Hearst to give you the real deal about how it was at El Morocco; that was a world he wasn't intimidated by. And Mr. Hearst, who had been in long association with motion pictures, expected to see something like the real deal from that world reported in his papers. The Hearsts also ran the most negligible of all the news-gathering services, the International News Service, which, nevertheless, gave you a feeling that the Hearst ownership had a kind of world view and world access. The final element was "Puck—The Comic Weekly," the best comics section in New York. With Mr. Hearst you had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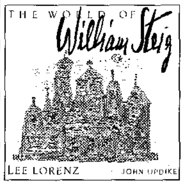

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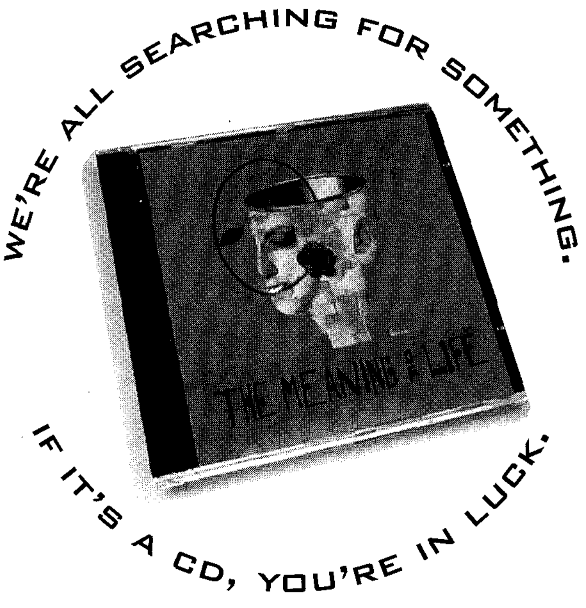
I don't think there can have been many people reading those papers from the point of view I was developing in the nineteen-fifties. After all, a newspaper is something that you read—or not. No one is there to force you to read it, and usually you read just one—the one that appeals to you. But when my father pointed out this Whole to me—America, New York City, the New York newspaper, Franklin Roosevelt, and us Trows—he said that all of it was important, and all of it fitted together. I took him at his word, and agreed to look at things that way. I was daunted by the *Times*, but I could see the other papers in relation—each as one part of a functioning world. The old Wasps were on the way out; the new Wasps were flat and status-conscious; the tabloids had their own netherworld of strident liveliness.

Now, however, I see the whole thing as a tragic dysfunction—as horses pulling in different directions and running roughshod over what really needed to be said. The newspapers represented different parts of what I have come to call an Assumed Dominant Mind. And the very existence of that Assumed Dominant Mind, with its narrowness—even at the *Times*—meant trouble: it meant creeping catatonia, and creeping illiteracy, and those have come to pass.

FOLLOWING A STORY—NOW AND THEN

TODAY, if you know how a newspaper is edited, you can read it quite quickly. The better the newspaper, the faster you can read it, because you can trust the consistent mind of the editors.

There isn't much real news. Most news has to do with what a government (or a unit of government) is willing to let you know about what it is saying or doing in relation to another government or unit of government. You could spend your whole life reading about the Middle East. You don't want to do that. But if there is a car bombing in Tel Aviv you may want to read about that for reasons of your own. And then what you must do is see what Arafat says the next day. You have to get to know the reporter. What does he think is going to happen? The clue is in his style, in his selection of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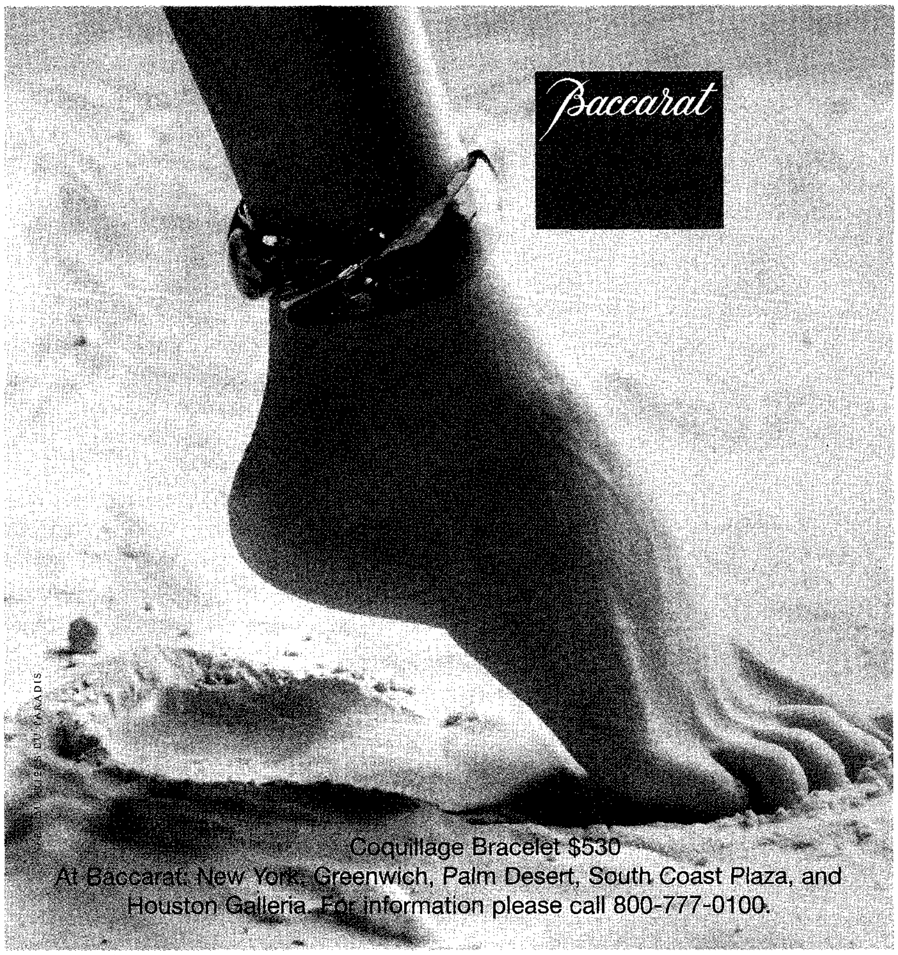

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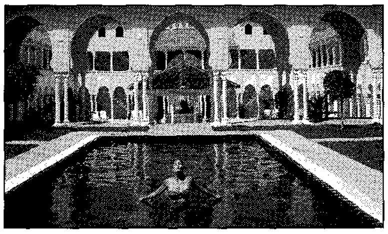

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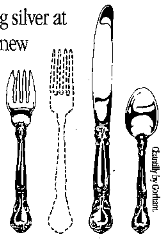
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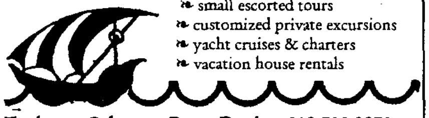

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quotes. Does he quote the mainstream professor who thinks that the peace process will stay on track anyway, or does he take you into a violent neighborhood and show you a picture of hopelessness? I dislike all talk about "bias" and "lack of objectivity" in a reporter. He is there to clue you in to his best assessment—his reading of the code of events. He has no way to be objective (other than not to have a personal stake in the argument); he doesn't know the real facts—or, if he does, it's so rare as not to be worth the mentioning. He can't read Arafat's mind, or Assad's, or anybody's. In a way, what you value most about him is his appropriate subjectivity, his feel for events.

I read every word in the paper about Algeria, Ukraine, and Belarus: these are the underreported zones. You should get a sense of what is underreported and what is overreported. Overreported is Newt Gingrich. One-tenth of one per cent of what has been written about Newt would have done you just fine. You also need to read every word about Shanghai, Chinese billionaires, and the Russian mafia. Also currency trading. Stories are boiling (or seem to be boiling) here. If you have a personal reason to take an interest in a Baby Bell reaching out to yet another media conglomerate, sure, read it, but be aware that the deal will ravel or unravel, happen or not happen, be consummated or not consummated, be important or not important, and that you will have just read ten thousand words.

I read nothing about the Equal Rights Amendment during the time it was in the news, for instance. Either it was going to get to be an amendment or it wasn't. There are a lot of stories like that: years in the making; infinite detail; you have no say as to the outcome; it will happen or it won't.

Do yourself a favor. Just wait to see if Al Gore is nominated. Wake up the day after the next Democratic Convention and ask a friend, "Did Gore make it?" My guess is that he will have made it. Take the fifty-thousand-word investment you were prepared to make on Gore's election prospects and follow another story.

Television will not allow you to follow a story. Each broadcast is self-contained; television newspeople are embarrassed if they ever have to remind you that the story existed yesterday as well. The only exception is Big Human Interest. If it has the quality of a soap opera—O. J. Simpson, or the plane that exploded mysteriously—then they trust it as a story that will have had the dramatic elements necessary for their formula. It's reliable. It won't let them down. Television hates stories that turn out to be—you know—disappointing. No cum shot.

Take Belarus. This guy who runs Belarus may turn out to be our next big-time bad guy. We don't know now that he will; and, until he does, who cares? There are no rules in TV journalism; there is no American Medical Association to revoke your license; there are no rules of engagement. If the Belarus guy does turn out to be what we will call a real factor, we just do an In-Depth Segment, and fast. Dan flies to Minsk and does an interview, and CBS's ass is covered retroactively.

The best example of what I'm talking about concerning following a story was the *Times'* coverage of the Kabila phenomenon in what was then called Zaire. I read every word. You could see the reporter struggling with it. At first, it was confusing. The first three stories I read two or three times. There were rebels, and there were refugees. The relationship wasn't clear, it wasn't clear in the reporter's style just who was who—even if, perhaps, it was clear in his mind.

The more the reporter came to understand the subtext and the history, however, the more the text of the story became legible to him, and to the reader; and the more elaborate the story became, the simpler it was to read. One day, there was a cum shot: he understood the story; the story made its way into Katanga, and back to Patrice Lumumba and into the question of Zaire's mineral wealth, and South Africa's role, and so forth. With the reporter's full participation, the story achieved critical mass. It made this reader happy.

The *Times* and the Washington *Post* are the only newspapers you can follow a story in now. Political news in the *Post* is still interesting, because Watergate was, and is, a visceral experience there. The *Times* believes in its soul that foreign news still matters (even if the reader happens not to agree). The *Times*, by my perception, is a little ashamed, at just this minute, that it still carries this old belief around. But it shouldn't be ashamed.

IN the *Times* of February 1, 1950, however, every story is a story that demands to be followed. Almost every story chills the bones, for it takes one back into the past and unfolds the "F" of Future.

In going through the paper (I went to the State Library in Albany and looked at it on microfilm), I was able to read—and, finally, understand—this mystical object that had puzzled me as a boy. I saw an advertisement for an appliance-store chain in the paper. Vim, that chain of stores was called. "Vim Vim Vim Vim Vim for Value" was its radio slogan. That was the kind of message I was really capable of absorbing as a boy. An advertisement for an appliance-store chain. A picture of a television set—available at Vim—with a corny cowboy on the screen.

Almost fifty years later, as I looked at the front page of the paper, what I saw was a kind of soap opera for Edwardians. These stories all referred back to the world of Bismarck. Readers of the paper had been born in 1910 or 1900 or 1890. They had been present for Act I (the First World War), for the disastrous entr'acte, for Act II (the Second World War), and here was . . . Well, let me try to give you a sense of the paper that day.

Critics since 1950 have complained, with increasingly loud voices, to this day, about the power of the *Times*. "The New York *Times* represents the establishment. . . . The State Department calls the New York *Times* and suggests that they do this or they do that" and "The people at the New York *Times* are much too much in touch with the government." Well, all this may be true, but the *Times* is now about ten per cent as representative of the ruling mind of America as it was in 1950, and, moreover, the ruling mind of America has split up now, into a hundred pieces, and even if you put those hundred pieces together you wouldn't have what you had then.

If we look at the front page of the *Times* of February 1, 1950—at the juxtaposition of the headlines—we're looking at an important piece of theatre. This theatre has certain qualities. It is

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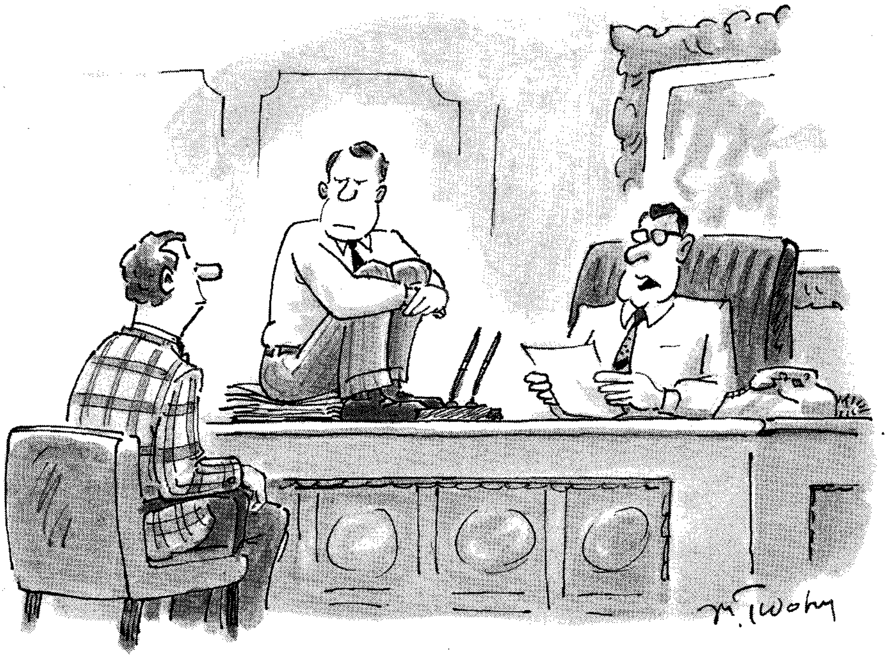
oblique. It uses a newspaper template of reportage. If you could imagine your own personal life put into a *Times* template—the announcement of your domestic problems, the paying off of your mortgage, whatever it is—it would be oblique. There would be a formality, a system of arrangement, that would give the information about your personal life but would not give, perhaps, the visceral quality you know your life has. That is what a newspaper template of the *Times* type does; it drains out the visceral.

In the *Times* of 1950, there are eight columns, which are more columns than we have now, and Column 8 is the column of the lead story—it's way over on the right-hand side, to which the eye drifts naturally, top right—and the second lead is Column 1, and that itself is an interesting bit of theatre, because to get to know that Column 1 is the second lead requires a little knowledge, a little self-discipline. And that was the nature of the *Times*-reading mind of February 1, 1950: the natural drift of the eye was acknowledged, but a little bit of self-discipline was assumed as well. A certain amount of insider's information about how the *Times* was edited was assumed; well, that's not assumed by the editors of the *Times* today. In fact, the *Times* today is terrified that its reader's mind is a mystery.

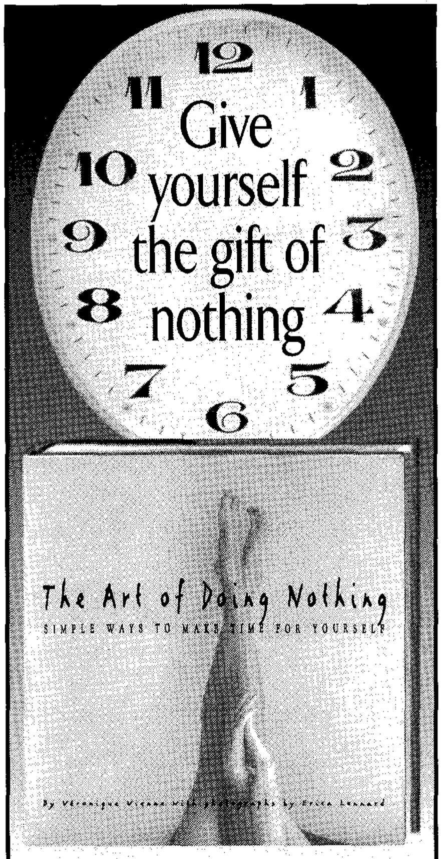
In any case, the second lead in the *Times* of February 1, 1950, is "PRESIDENT SEEKS 70 DAY COAL TRUCE, FACT FINDING BOARD." There was a coal strike, and the coal miners were powerful and militant; they felt that they were any man's equal, that they didn't like their rate of pay, and that the President was in opposition to them. The miners represented the decent working people of this country who'd met their test, time after time, including service in the Second World War, and were dissatisfied.

Next to the second lead is a serialization of Winston Churchill's work "The Second World War." And the installment of February 1, 1950, came from Volume III, "The Grand Alliance; Book I: Germany Drives East." Churchill wasn't in office in 1950, but he was, uncategorically, the No. 1 guy in the world. He'd been proved right. People remembered that they, perhaps, had not wanted to go to war against Germany. And Americans were aware, too, that they had been, in a way, submissive to Churchill in the war. Churchill represented one possibility for our soap opera, since he was very powerful at that moment. But he was destined to become unpowerful almost immediately. The strange fact being that Winston Churchill's reëlevation to office in 1951 represented something of a defeat for him, because his mind—his glorious, old-fashioned mind—was suddenly, and obviously, not sufficient to deal with our postwar world.

The lead story is "TRUMAN ORDERS



"I'll put your application on file, Mr. Brandt, but I'm quite happy with my current paperweight."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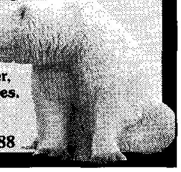
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HYDROGEN BOMB BUILT FOR SECURITY PENDING AN ATOMIC PACT; CONGRESS HAILS STEP; BOARD BEGINS JOB." Its second headline is "HISTORIC DECISION"; a third is "PRESIDENT SAYS HE MUST DEFEND NATION AGAINST POSSIBLE AGGRESSOR." I remember that moment. The A-bomb had been viewed for a time as an unparalleled thing. And, for a time, it was, because we had it and no one else did. After the end of the Second World War, we were the one superpower, because we were the country that had this weapon. It was an uncomfortable situation in some ways but comfortable in other ways. We were confident that we weren't going to drop the A-bomb again so we felt, in our own hearts, that nuclear war was not actually a possibility. Well, of course, then the Russians developed an A-bomb, and that shattered us all to the core (just as it would shatter us all to the core now if we were suddenly to cease, once again, to be the world's only superpower). The H-bomb told us, "Oh, God, not only is this what we have, it's what we're gonna have, and we can't see the end of it. Is there gonna be an I-bomb after an H-bomb? We don't know." It's one of those moments in which you suddenly discover that the unparalleled thing that pushed you over the frontier isn't the limit—you're going to march on. The lead stories on the front page of the *Times* were almost impossible to reconcile with each other, almost impossible to bring together. The H-bomb had nothing to do with Winston Churchill, with English-language dominance, or with morals; it had nothing to do with coal miners, with the dissatisfaction of the working people of America. This was about mechanization taking on a life of its own.

There's one other story on the front page—in the fourth column—that strikes a chord with me: it's "FRANCE PROTESTS SOVIET RECOGNITION OF HO CHI MINH RULE." Need I say more?

THERE is no story on the front page of the *Times* of February 1, 1950, however, that is related in any way, shape, or form to the world that is being reported on today by the panels of communications experts you can watch on C-SPAN or CNN. You might as well be talking about a different country. In the *Times* of February 1, 1950, the country we were going to have appears on a

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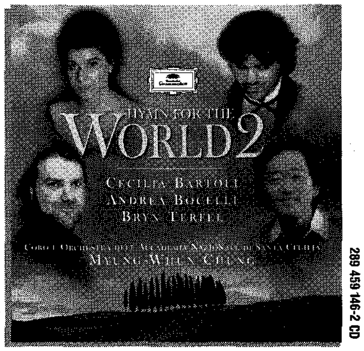

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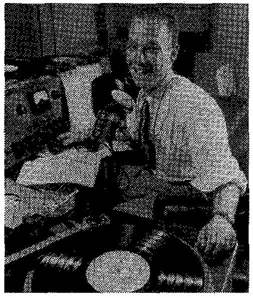

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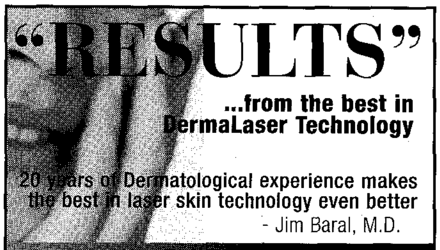

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back page. It appears in a section called "Programs on the Air," which is itself divided into four sections, and the fourth section is a combination of television and FM radio. There isn't much in it.

It's striking, as one looks at the paper of February 1, 1950, to see what was destined to be of paramount importance and what was going to go away. Churchill was simply going to go away, and fast—certainly by 1956. Coal miners? Well, the coal mines were going to shut down. The H-bomb? It looks as though, for a time, we have put it away. I hope that's true. In any case, when it comes to developing a national mind sufficient to encompass the meaning of the H-bomb, we have never tried to do it, and probably it's impossible to imagine doing it. But those tiny television listings were the seeds out of which our new national culture was to grow.

While I was learning to read the papers, television—an ignorant little snippet of a medium—was in the wings. It had no real standing in February, 1950, but out of all the cultural avatars I encountered in New York as a boy it was what was going to be left standing. Looking back at the *Times* of 1950, I wonder if our current culture of irony and anger and freneticism—our TV culture—doesn't have its essential qualities because the culture as a whole in America in 1950 felt in its bones a contradiction. Having just climbed the pinnacle, stretching our cultural fabric to the limit along the way, we were condemned by the nature of the moment—technology interacting with our fundamental war-weariness and our need for distraction—to embrace a foolish child's reaction to a world situation that demanded a mind more remarkably adult than any of us had in fact achieved.

My view of the civilization as it was presented in the *Times* of February, 1950, is that in the Second World War the Germans lost and television won.

OVERVIEW

THERE are four kinds of newspapers. (And that's all there are.)

(1) Let's take the tabloid first. The tabloid sensibility knows only one job: to make the world safe for the moment in which it had its hit—the nineteen-twenties, the age of Broadway Brevities, the gangster, the flagpole sitter. Consider the former Soviet Union today. Journalists are simple creatures, and the "scoop" has left Russia, so all that is left is ordinary work—you know, inventory, facts, and that hardest job of all, interesting the reader and getting him to follow the story. In the bad old days, Russia wouldn't let us in, and that was a big part of every story reported out of Russia—how journalism in the Soviet Union was under the thumb of the state, and how foreign journalists were spied on, and so forth. Well, it's different now, and we get less, not more.

Recently, I heard on the radio a story out of Russia. A young man is going to drive from Moscow to Vladivostok in his Yugo automobile. First gear. That was the hook. He's a flagpole sitter, this young man with the Yugo automobile, a marathon dancer, a jazz baby in the making; and if you'll just think about this man in the Yugo you'll understand all you need to understand about the tabloid model, which owns the aesthetic of the World As We Know It Today. Now it has a Yugo racing across the tundra in first gear.

(2) Information for and by the Dominant Mind in a limited sphere. The *Racing Form* is the best newspaper in America, in a way. The part of the public that follows horse racing knows a lot about horse racing, and the people at the *Racing Form* know more. Readers of the *Times* are now a little vague about Winston Churchill—who he was and whether we still like him or not—but the readers of the *Racing Form* are not vague about Churchill Downs, where the Kentucky Derby is run. Events on the world stage as of 1943 are no longer before us in clarity, but readers of the *Racing Form*, many of them, will recall that Count Fleet won the Triple Crown in that year.

The *Wall Street Journal* would like you to believe that it is the *Racing Form* for business and finance, and indeed it used to be, but it isn't anymore. It missed a big beat: the game changed—the mudders began to win on dry tracks, and so forth—and the *Journal* never told us the reason. You can't follow a story in the *Journal*—this despite the fact that its old-timey appearance makes it look as if it had been published (and thought over) at the Morgan Library. The *Wall Street Journal* can and will tell you that Citicorp has gobbled up whomever, but what banking is, and how one thing got to be another—all that is apparently as mysterious to the people at the *Journal* as it is to poor us, their readers.

The Washington *Post* is a paper for a company town. People complain that the *Post* is too much like the *Racing Form*. They shouldn't. What they should complain about is that the paper of the moment in the mid-seventies had twenty years to make itself our national newspaper, and didn't do it. Most "good" newspapers—the Boston *Globe*, the Los Angeles *Times*, the Miami *Herald*, etc.—fall into the *Post* category, except that they never will have a chance to be our national newspaper.

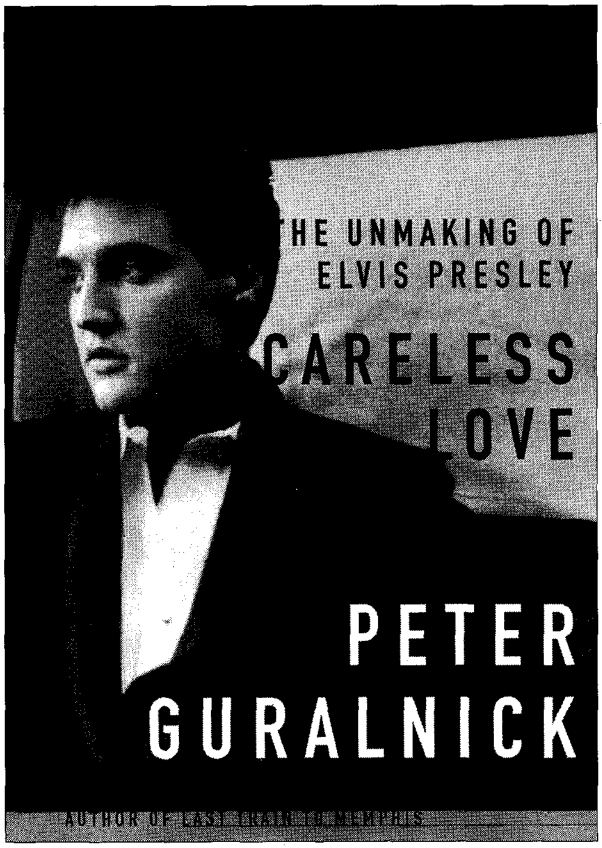
(3) The *Times*. Our national treasure. Our Marilyn. Our Elvis. In other words: What We Have. People who complain murderously about the *Times* ought to be shot. We all ought to pray for the continued financial well-being of the Sulzbergers.

(4) Papers of the Assumed Dominant Mind. In 1950, the job of owning the Assumed Dominant Mind fell to newspaper people. Let me go back for a minute to the physical city of New York in 1950. It was old and gray. There hadn't been much building since the Depression. Rockefeller Center and the Waldorf-Astoria seemed almost new. He was an Old Man, New York was: powerful, but a little weary; victorious, but in need of a rest. He spoke through the papers. Now the Assumed Dominant Mind belongs to television and other visual people. *USA Today* is back-formed from the Assumed Dominant Mind of television. There is nothing oracular about *USA Today*. It is a printout, a downloading of the mind you already have. What seems oracular in our new national newspaper is that marvellous, all-in-color weather page. ◆

WE DON'T WANT TO HEAR ABOUT IT DEPARTMENT

[*From the Novato* (*Calif.*) *Marin Independent Journal*]

A woman in the 200 block of Cazneau Street reported that someone was using a device that creates a feeling of heat in her body. Police decided the woman did not need hospitalization. She said she will seek her own cure.



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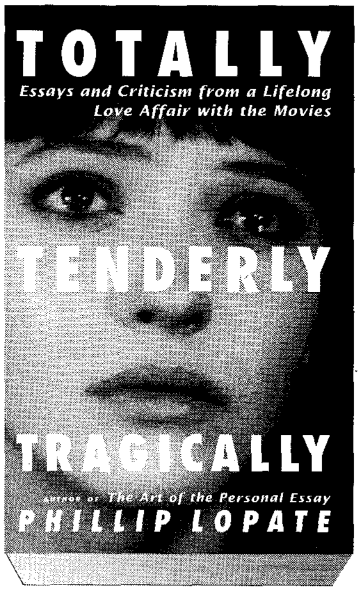
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FICTION

OTTO THE BLOODY

The millennium (of course)—the last time around.

BY KEN KESEY

Lemme see, lemme see.... What was that dude's name? You'd think I'd remember after that goodbye bash he threw. Then again, when you're in my line of work, you get to attend so many goodbye bashes.... It wasn't Sodom or Gomorrah. It wasn't the fall of Rome. Oh, wait a minute, I know! We're talking Jesus Christ time here, A.D.J.C. time, and I quote: "When the thousand years are expired, the *chosen* shall be *lifted* up to *Heaven* and *Satan* shall be loosed from his prison and the *fan* shall catch *up* to the *shit.*" Ho ho ha ha . . . Revelations 20:7, or something like that. Great stuff. O.K., I think I got it straight. Here we go . . .

The date was nine hundred and ninety-nine years eleven months and thirty days, give or take a few leap years, in merry ole Yermany—Der Fodderland, where else? That's cannon fodderland, if you get what I mean.

Otto was the dude's name. Prince Otto, old King Otto the Great's only son—a pious little prick if you've ever seen one, raised by six nuns, tutored by seven priests, and tortured by endless boils. The ideal combo of spiritual nutrients for the more sinister seeds of Scripture, wouldn't you agree? Even as a toddler, little Otto *dug* on Revelations. He loved being read to sleep by those seven priests, a different reader for every night of the week. By the time his voice was changing, he could quote the whole Book of Revelations by heart. The priests were just so proud. And by the time he was sprouting whiskers on his boils he was having holy fits and seeing apocalyptic angels! Visions! Beasts, heavenly chariots, the whole nine yards. The priests judged their princely pupil ready to take the tiller and steer the ship of state through the century's remaining years. So they sent forth word to Otto the Great that young Otto's visions clearly showed that he was ready to assume the realm's helm and become the kingdom's Holy See.

Well, *old* Otto didn't see it quite that way. He sent forth guards to bring the sanctimonious little snotnose back in chains. Steer the ship of state indeed! He'd show him where he could stick that tiller!

In the meantime, the King decided he'd pop over to the chapel and pray for his own guidance, you know what I mean? Just to cover all bets. And while he was kneeling a dark swarm of avenging angels—seven strong, 'tis said—came flapping out of the shadows and hacked the imperial impediment into seven pieces, which they bore away in seven different directions. None of the seven gory pieces ever saw one another again.

Thus the son of Otto the Great became known as Otto the Bloody—the scourge of blasphemers and fornicators and sorcerers and so forth. He scourged so many out of his court that pretty soon there were only a half dozen fornicators and sorcerers left. Soon it began to look to him as if his earthly chores were drawing to an end, what with the end of the world slated for the New Year and all. . . .

As I recall it, he summoned his royal retinue into the imperial beer hall and made the announcement "Doomsday night approacheth. We oughta go up on top of a mountain and celebrate the end of the world as though we were *causing* it!"

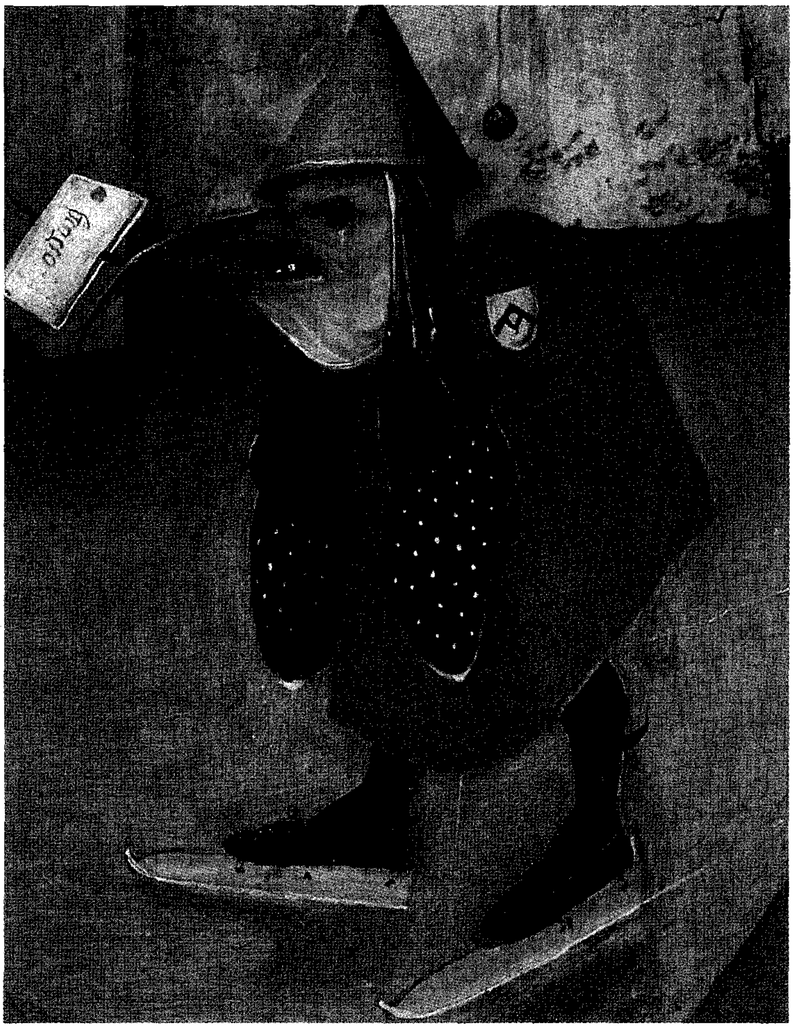
"Damn straight," his retinue agreed. "Doomsday."

So on New Year's Eve 999, he took his generals, and his cronies, and his seven priests, and six nuns, and his pregnant wife, and a pig, and a great big mastiff, some horses and horse carts and wine wagons and stuff, and they headed up to the top of one of the nearby mountains. Not much more than a hill, actually. But it was getting dark. The wife's sensitivities hurt from all that bouncing behind a flatulent horse. The priests needed a place to pray, and the nuns needed a place to pee. This hill would do.

They killed the pig and spitted him over a big fire. They hacked the swine and swilled the wine. They partied. They danced. They swore allegiances to angels that they couldn't see. And then morning dawned, and the world had not ended after all. No.

Otto was a tad peeved. His wife was complaining about the cramps. The priests were praying their asses off. And yet the world hadn't come to an end. So Otto poached a priest, a real fat one, because the other priests reasoned that this was probably the problem, this one fat priest. God could not abide a glutton.

They rested during the day, built the fire back up, barbecued the mastiff. Come dark, they set about it again. Parading around the top of the hill. Screaming like banshees. Weeping and heaping ashes on their heads and getting dirt in their eyes. Wet to the knees, they passed out again. And in the morning . . . in the morning . . . the earth was still turning. The sun was still shining. And King Otto the Bloody was one pissed-off liege.



Otto, scourge of blasphemers and fornicators and sorcerers, scourged so many out of his court that pretty soon there were only a half dozen left.

DETAIL FROM "TEMPTATION OF ST. ANTONIUS" BY HIERONYMUS BOSCH; A.K.G., BERLIN/SUPERSTOCK

SO. Year one thousand, three poached priests into January and a couple plump nuns for good measure. Bloody King Otto on top of Mt. Millennium with pregnant Queen Otto. The babe's birth and the end of the world both long overdue. Thunder rolling. Wind howling. Wife whining, "Oh, husband mine, were it just *me* not one word of discontent would escape my lips. But what about the baby?"

Otto was pretty discontented himself. Wine gone. Retinue run off. Priests either dead or fled. Nothing left on the hill to be a king over except a run-down horse and cart and a bellyaching wife.

He tossed his wife in the cart and climbed on the horse and headed for home. Cross-country. Cart creaking. Horse farting. Wife bitching at every ditch and bump, "What about the baby? What about the baby?"

Come dawn of that fourth day in January, she was pissing and moaning before the sun was up. Otto was weighing the various alternatives to poaching, and he let his mind drift a little bit. The cart bounced over a boulder, catapulting wife down the hill.

Seemed like a good idea to the horse. He bucked free of his burden and headed off himself, the busted cart bouncing behind.

By the time Otto reached his young wife, she was breathing her last.

"Saints be praised" was Otto's reaction. "At peace at last."

Then, in her muddy petticoats, Otto saw something *move.* It was a baby. A baby untimely ripped, bespattered with the blood of the borning—a boy baby! A *prince!* And for the first time in his egocentric existence Otto felt a teensy-weensy tug on heartstrings he never even knew were strung. He tore the petticoats off his dearly departed to clean up his royal heir, and discovered—kneeling there on a grassy slope, the winter birds singing, the winter sun shining—that those weren't splatters of a troubled birth at all.

They were boils! Boils! Boils!

"Hey up there, Almighty!" he shouted at the sky. "What is this crap? I go up on the mountain like I'm supposed to, only to find You are playing with a crooked deck? I follow all the rules, and you deal me a kid with boils all over him? What does it all mean? Will these torments never cease?"

And the sky grinned back down on him and seemed to say, "Tune in at the end of Act III and have these rancid riddles unravelled."

So off in the chilly Teutonic toolies we got young King Otto, his boily baby in one hand and his dearly departed in the other. Babe beginning to howl hungrily as Mama cooled rapidly. Cart busted, horse run off . . . not to mention the End of the World being a no-show. Was ever a monarch so sorely vexed?

He gnashed his teeth and tore his hair. Didn't help. He raised his gaze to the heavens for guidance. Nothing but nothingness. He lowered his eyes to the earth. What but weeds and boulders begored by the babe's untimely beginning? Then, from the Stygian depths of despair, a glimmer . . . nay, a beacon! A sight both beautiful and terrible. Uplifted to the frosty sun: the twin bounties of his lifeless bride, leaking like alabaster fountains!

That's when our hard-hearted hero started going, as they say, a little bit around the bend.

But who's to say, who's to say? If you

can get blood out of a boulder, why not milk out of a corpse? And after that, out of a nanny goat, and after that, out of an ass, and finally—my personal favorite—a grazing milk cow with a twisted horn and a couple of offspring of her own. Otto reasoned she was set up to feed four as easy as two.

There were also henhouses and cabbage patches and tuber cellars in the surrounding countryside. Hayricks to sleep in and horse blankets to borrow. In broad daylight as well as at night. The rustic rubes never seemed to notice.

Father and son scavenged and scrabbled and survived. Country living agreed with the pair. The kid's complexion commenced to clear, while Dad's bile subsided. They plundered the countryside with what seemed to be complete impunity. It never occurred to Otto that the rubes were witness to every clumsy theft. He and his offspring had become famous. They were the excited gossip of every hut and hovel in the hinterlands. Here was the royal family, Crazy Otto the Bloody, king of all he surveyed, with his Pimply Prince under his arm like a prize piglet—filching curds and black breads off back steps like common crimpers.

In fact, it never occurred to poor addled Otto that he was king of anything... until he crested a rise one wandering morn and saw in the distance a grand castle.

"Home," he told the kid.

It was May, and the edelweiss was blooming. It had taken father and son four months to cover the nine miles from Mt. Millennium back to the castle gate. Came to something like two miles a month, give or take a few leagues or furlongs or whatever they used to measure distances back then.

Otto was puzzled when they passed through the gate unchallenged. Once inside, he saw why. He'd slept in cleaner hog pens! Dismal desolation was everywhere he looked. Rat-ridden alleyways. Run-down shops. Citizens cowering under the baleful watch of helmeted guards. Ragged old men and street urchins squabbling over garbage rights. I mean, *Bummersville.* How could things around the old home town have changed so much in a few months?

It never occurred to him that things around town had not changed at all during his sojourn through the sticks. He had.

He marched up the steps, past the gawking guards, and straight into the royal court, right in the middle of the afternoon scourging session. A goodly assortment of prostrate peasants were being flogged "to *purge* their filthy *souls*"—the purgers let it be known—"in preparation for the *apocalyptic extravaganza* that is *still impending!*" Liftoff had been put off, you see, to allow time for this holy housecleaning. A scene right out of Hieronymus Bosch: floggers flogging... organs wailing... holy men damning everyone in sight.

"Enough already!" Otto bellers. "As your king, I command you to *cease! this! bullshit! forevermore!*"

Whoa! The presiding priests piss their royal robes at the sight of Otto and his heir apparent, but they try to bluff it out. What *proof* has he that he's their king? He certainly doesn't look like their king—all ragged and hairy like a crazy man—and, besides, their king had been carried up to glory from the mountaintop. Many had witnessed the miracle. Who could *testify* otherwise? they demand in rising clamor. "*Who?*"

"What about the baby?" Otto holds up the protesting child. "What about the baby?" he asks again. "What about the baby?"

And the clamor is cut off in mid-rise by the twisted logic of this crazy man's question—*shnick,* clean, as though by a scythe.

Because right there it lies—the eternal kernel of this long-winded enterprise. "What about the baby?" Otto demands again. "What about the baby?"

And the baby cries. And the prostrate peasants from the floor do rise. "What about the baby!" they take up the cry. "What about the baby! What about the baby!"

And the priests and inquisitors and guards realize, "The gig is up, the rubes have turned—it's every holy man for himself!"

And the moral of this twisted story (more twisted, perhaps, than true)? There is no end to glory.... For the new belongs to the new.

It's a simple trick. Take it or leave it, deny or believe it, sing hey nonny-nonny and spin till you're sick. Me? Armageddon outta here. Hee hee ho... ◆

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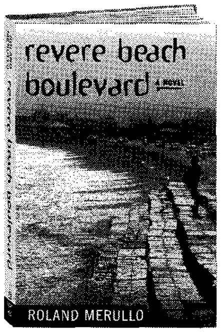

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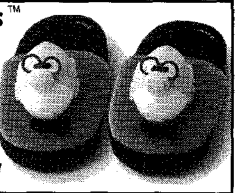

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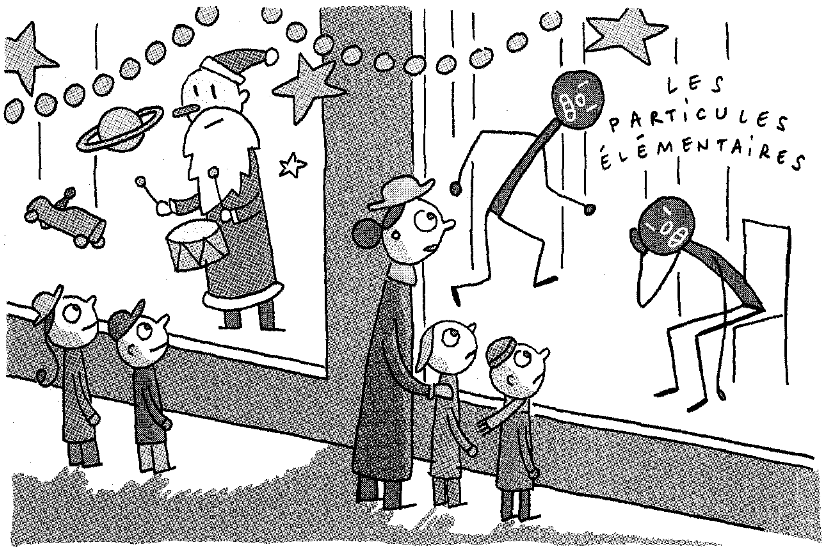
PARIS JOURNAL

NOËL CONTENDERE

A political impasse gives way to a literary scandale.

BY ADAM GOPNIK

THE Christmas windows in Paris are weird this year. Christmas, which twenty years ago in France was still a Catholic holiday, lit by Midnight Mass and presided over by a gaunt, ascetic Père Noël, is now an all-American potlatch, with fat Santa figurines climbing up the façades on the Boulevard Saint-Germain and Johnny Mathis blaring from the loudspeakers. In Paris, as everywhere else, the American imperium of shopping opportunities continues to rule unchecked. There are signs of dissent, though. The Left Bank department store, Le Bon Marché, which usually has hordes of industrious elves and bears dancing at the end of invisible wires, has filled its windows with life-size human figures mechanically enacting a story of incest, bestiality, death threats, and fashion narcissism. It is an updated retelling of Charles Perrault's popular fairy tale "Peau d'Âne": a king in mourning for his queen threatens to force himself on his own daughter and is outwitted only by the princess's decision first to extort from him a series of overwrought fantasy dresses and then to have him kill the royal donkey, who defecates gold and whose dripping skin she wears . . . Well, it's a long story and a strange one, and what connection it has with Christmas—or what the Parisian children, leaning into the animated windows in their duffel coats, scarves carefully bunched around their throats, make of it—is hard to imagine.



"In Paris this autumn," one reporter has written, "you are not Dreyfusard or anti-Dreyfusard but pro- or anti-Houellebecq."

PHILIPPE PETIT-ROULET

Maybe it's something in the air. The literary event of this autumn has been the publication of a novel with essentially the same themes as the Bon Marché window display. The novel is called "Les Particules Élémentaires," or "Elementary Particles"; it is the second novel by a forty-year-old former National Assembly clerk named Michel Houellebecq, and since it came out, in late August, it has sold two hundred and thirty thousand copies—an enormous number for a literary book, even in France. It just won the Prix Novembre, after being ostentatiously snubbed for the Goncourt, and is to be made into a movie; it will be published in America by Knopf. The debate about its importance, or *l'affaire Houellebecq*, as it is inevitably known, has been featured five times on the front page of *Le Monde* and has been the subject of an op-ed

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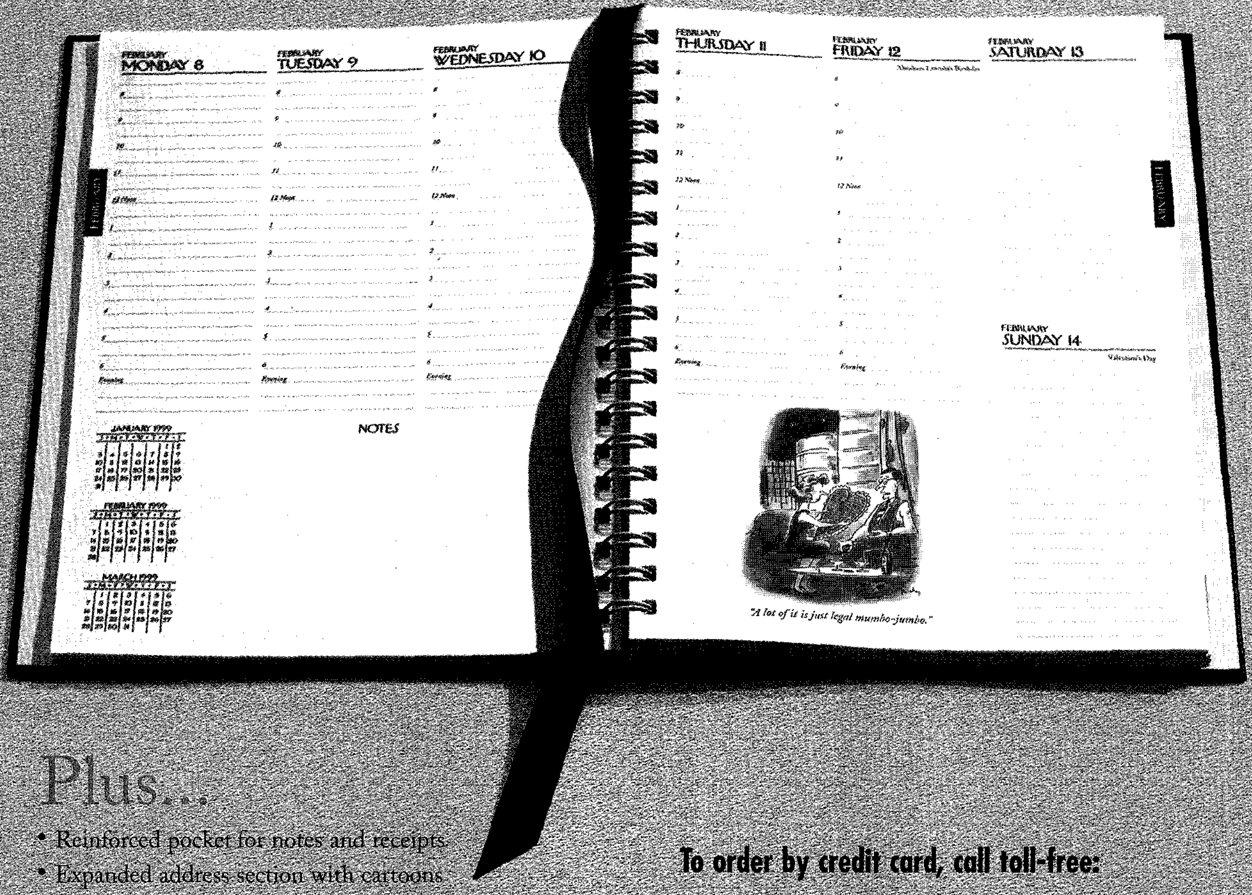
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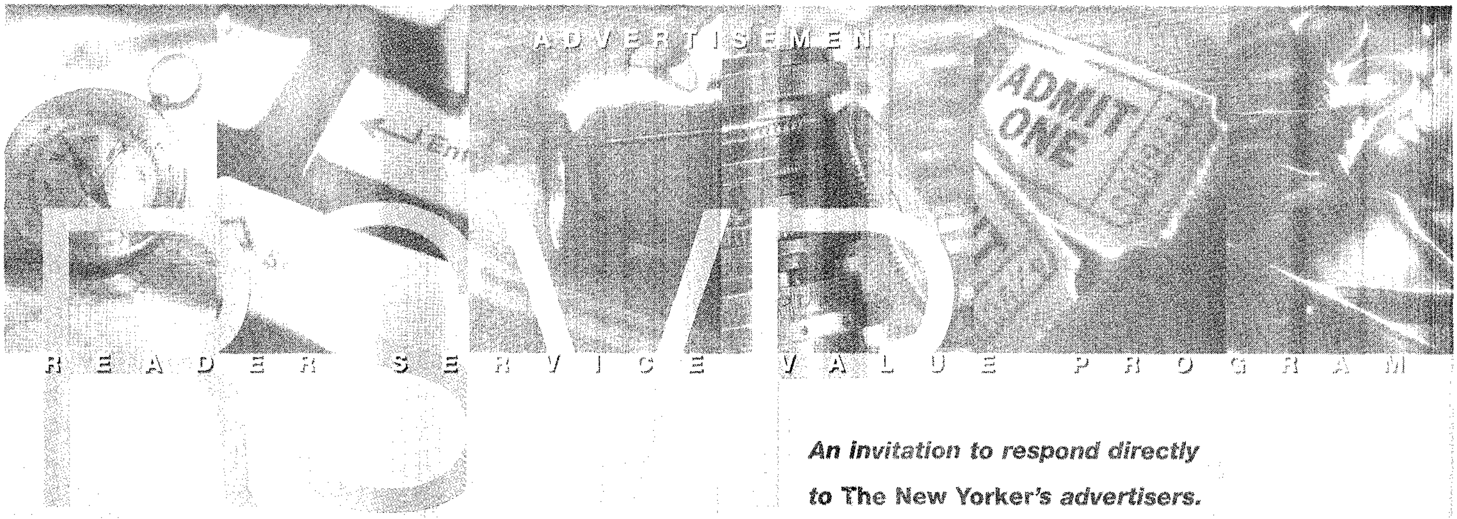

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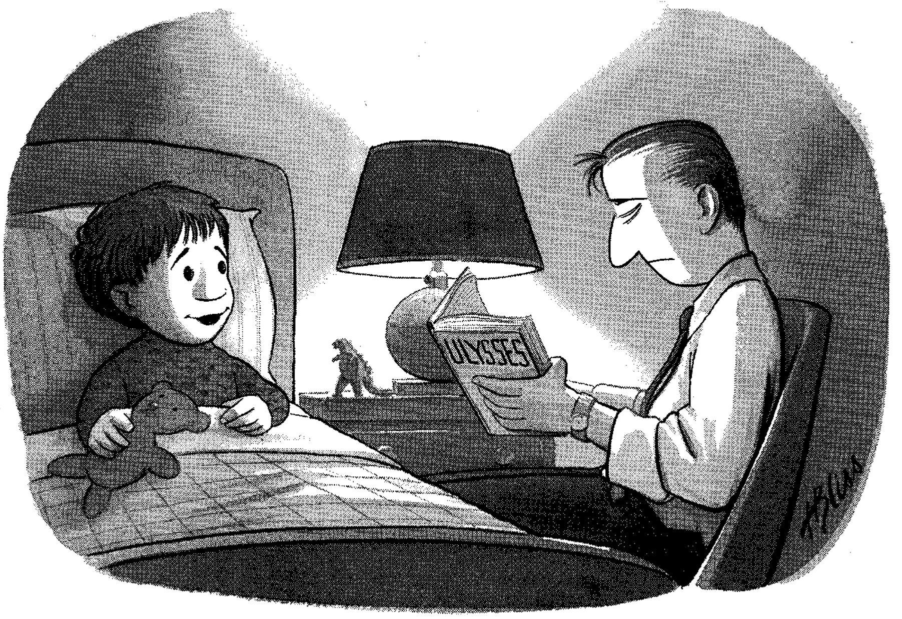
article in the same paper suggesting that its publication marks the end of thirty years of decadence and disconnection in French fiction and the beginning of a "post-naturalism" that, "whether this is pleasing or not," unmasks the old humanism. No dinner party is possible without a discussion of Houellebecquism, pro and con. "In Paris this autumn," one reporter has written, "you are not Dreyfusard or anti-Dreyfusard, as at the beginning of the century, but pro- or anti-Houellebecq."

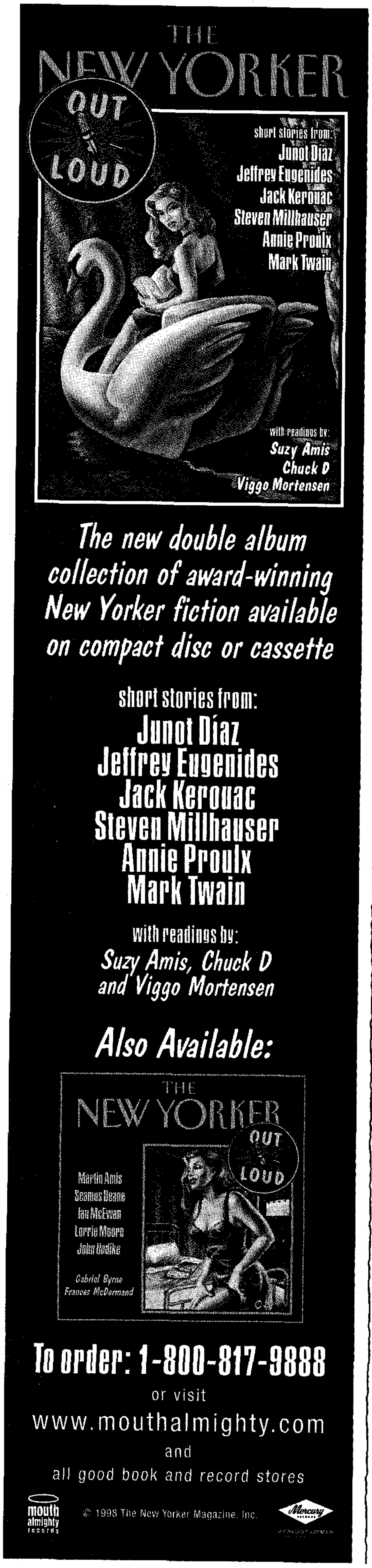
"Les Particules Élémentaires" is less a novel than a kind of eighteenth-century *conte moral*, at once a narrative and a philosophical essay, in which an obsession with oral sex oscillates strangely with fatuous ideological posturing, as in a story by Sade or in the proceedings of an American congressional committee. It is obscene, hateful, pretentious, half educated, funny, ambitious, and oddly moving. An all-knowing narrator relates the story of the sentimental education and the sufferings of two French half brothers, one a libertine and one a scientist, in the years since 1968. A thesis leads this novel by the nose, and the thesis, still startling in France, is that the libertarian advances of the post-'68 generations have led to a sinkhole of violence and despair: that materialism and sexual liberation end inevitably in misery, violence, and hopelessness. It is essentially a tract—though whether of the far left or of the far right no one is quite sure, which is one of the things that make it so piquant. It is violently anti-individualist and anti-rationalist ("To this need for rational certainty, the West will have finally sacrificed everything: its religion, its happiness, its hopes, and finally its life," the main character remarks at one point), and the only way out it offers lies in the possibility of taking a grimly stoical satisfaction in a scientific apocalypse that will put an end to humanity itself.

Michel Djerzinski, a researcher in genetics, and his half brother, Bruno, grow up in the French provinces and then in Paris. In the novel's first pages, we are warned that Michel will turn out to be the author of a "metaphysical mutation" as great, in its way, as Christianity or the rationalist scientific revolution. We then plunge, agreeably, into a detailed account of a French childhood and adolescence in the nineteen-sixties and seventies, just before the onset of the empire of television, when the cowboys and Indians in French magazines were still French. At one point, Bruno, sensualist-to-be, masturbates after staring at his mother's vulva as she lies asleep in bed with a lover.

The book's action is regularly interrupted by urgent, windy summaries of the historical context. "The libidinal mass consumption of North American origin (the songs of Elvis Presley, the films of Marilyn Monroe) spread throughout Western Europe," Houelle-



"Could you read the part where Stephen envisions life outside Dublin again?"



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becq writes, and he solemnly describes the emergence of eroticized teen magazines: "If they were situated in principle in a political perspective that contested capitalism, these magazines were in accord with the entertainment industry on the essential: the destruction of Judeo-Christian moral values, and an apology for youth and individual liberty." Though the editorials are for the most part written, like this one, in the vocabulary of the left, they are right-wing in spirit, and lead to a simple conclusion: liberation is inseparable from destruction, and the breakdown of the family in the pursuit of pleasure leaves people "naked to the winds of the market." The editorials are also meant to remind us that Michel and Bruno are merely "elementary particles" in a historical field—or, if you prefer, stick figures in a fable.

The two brothers go out into the world, Bruno in search of pleasure, Michel in search of understanding. Bruno embarks on a tepid marriage and becomes a professor in a suburban lycée. There is a long section in which Bruno tries to teach a passage from Proust to one of his black students:

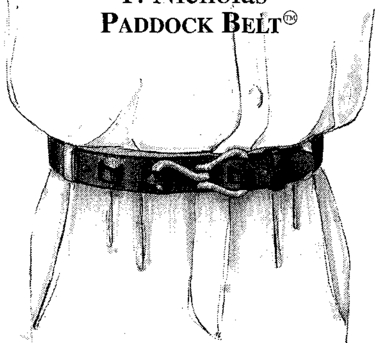
> I looked at Ben, he was scratching his head, scratching his balls, chewing his gum. What could he really understand, this big monkey?... I began to have trouble myself understanding what Proust wanted to say, exactly. Those dozens of pages on the purity of blood, on the nobility of genius as compared to the nobility of race, on the specific milieu of great professors of medicine... all this seemed to me completely meaningless. We lived today in a simplified world: The duchess of Guermantes had much less dough than Snoop Doggy Dogg; Snoop Doggy Dogg had less than Bill Gates—but he could make more girls wet. Two parameters, no more.... The strategies of distinction so subtly described by Proust had no meaning anymore. Proust had remained radically European, one of the last Europeans, with Thomas Mann; what he wrote no longer had any rapport whatever with reality.

Bruno, having violated the two taboos of *bien-pensant* thought, the equality of man and the superiority of French literature, becomes what used to be called a sex maniac. At a gym, he discovers that his penis is too small—"The theme... is totally absent from Sartre!" he protests—and has it surgically enlarged. He divorces his wife, and, with his new girlfriend, Christiane, takes part in a marathon of group sex. But Christiane's back breaks as she is being penetrated by a large stranger while fellating Bruno, and, left a paraplegic, she commits suicide. Bruno goes mad and is institutionalized.

Michel, meanwhile, finds a job at a genetic-research institute in Ireland, and there, with the help of Cray computers, he creates a self-replicating humanoid who is both immortal and sexless. The last gasp of a crazed materialism has produced its antithesis—a "metaphysical mutation," which will replace doomed humanity with a new being, who never has sex or gets sick. In the end, the book (which, we realize, has actually been written in the distant future) is dedicated to a vanished species, Man.

HOUELLEBECQ is an improbable hero. When, on a recent Sunday, he made his ritual début on Bernard Pivot's "Bouillon de Culture," the book program that every literate person in France watches, he was nervous, tic-ridden, perspiring, inarticulate—which, of course, only improved his score. Though the book's bitter tone and its readiness to say the unsayable recall Genet, and even Céline, its literary, dystopian feel brings it much closer to Burroughs (who anticipated the sexless clone years ago), or to J. G. Ballard. In spite of its distaste for America ("There is no example of a fashion that comes from the United States that has not succeeded in submerging Western Europe a few years later. None"), "Elementary Particles" is a very "American" book. If anything, Houellebecq envies the land of Bill Gates and Snoop Doggy Dogg for its nearness to the real infernal machines; the whole Western world is going straight to hell anyway, but at least Americans get the window seat.

One reason the ideas in "Elementary Particles" have resonated so widely is that they echo an anti-liberal plaint that has become prevalent in France since the Christmas strikes of 1995. By "liberalism" the French mean, of course, what Americans would call conservatism: the Thatcher-Greenspan belief in free enterprise and free markets, in material prosperity as a gauge of value, and, above all, in the absolute virtue of economic freedom even at the cost of social equality or cultural continuity. To the French left, "liberalism" (or, as it is often called, "wild" or "savage" lib-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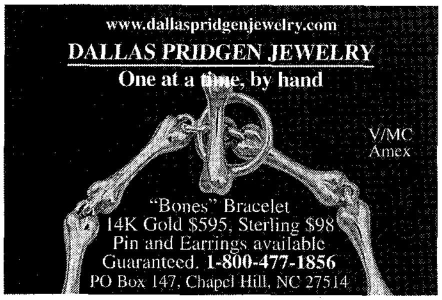
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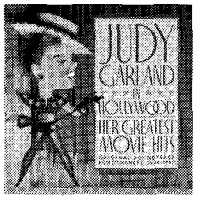

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eralism, a quaint and comic thought in American terms) has also come to mean, essentially, American civilization, in all its McDonald's, "Friends," and Exxon aspects. To be anti-liberal in France is not to be against big government; it is to be for it.

The new anti-liberal polemic has often been associated, fairly or unfairly, with people like the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who, in the past three years, has become France's "dominant intellectual"—a position that, though unofficial, is taken quite seriously here, the way the most powerful man in Hollywood is in America. But anyone familiar with the general shape of post-Marxist thought will immediately recognize the key ideas. Social consent is manufactured, and representative democracy is an illusion; there exists only the struggle for domination, and its prime arena is now not the marketplace but the media-place, where bourgeois culture attempts to perpetuate its domination by denying even the possibility of any other way. Liberal society is really a Hobbesian universe, made more dreadful by the gaiety of its disguise, like one of those serial killers dressed as clowns in a slasher movie.

The ideas are old; what's new is that they no longer propose any politics. The logic of Bourdieu's position, for example, leads inexorably to Leninism: if domination is the only genuine form of political exchange, and capitalism is the form that domination takes in modern societies, and if the masses are kept from power by the illusion of democracy . . . But no one wants to go there, and revolution is evaded in favor of a vague, apocalyptic premonition. Houellebecq's Michel doesn't join the Party, and he doesn't cultivate his garden. He just produces an amazing sexless immortal, an artifact of weird science—*that'll* show the liberals—and then commits suicide.

INEVITABLY, passionate political feelings disconnected from any practical politics leads to theatricality—to dissent directed against an unresisting object before an approving audience. This fall, the French high-school students, the lycéens, gathered day after day to march through Paris, throw a stone or two, and protest. Like the protesters in Lewis Carroll's "Sylvie and Bruno," who march with the cry "Less! Bread! More! Taxes!," the lycéens were, officially, striking for harder classes and more teachers. But their strike had nearly universal support: the government was for it, the opposition was for it, the press was for it. The students proceeded down the Boulevard Saint-Germain toward the Boulevard Raspail in ordered ranks; older students on their way to medical careers wore lab coats, while younger ones marched wearing in-line skates.

What was startling and instructive to an outsider was how pale and earnest the lycéens appeared as they marched; they had a worn-out, genuinely oppressed look that was miles away from the overfed, ironic knowingness of American kids of the same age. This is the result of the school system. The lycéens' normal, non-striking day begins at eight-thirty in the morning and often runs until six in the evening, and, for all the reforms that have been attempted in the last thirty years, it is still conducted in an atmosphere of rote learning and reflexive authoritarianism. (You see even ten- and eleven-year-olds emerging from school at the end of the day pale as veal and clutching at a *pain aux raisins*, starved for a little sweetness.)

This simple cultural fact explains a lot that is otherwise puzzling in French life, including large passages of "Les Particules Élémentaires." One of the oddities of the book is that Bruno's period of wild sexual experiment begins when he is forty. To an American, the slow, insidious development of libertinism in Houellebecq's characters can seem less a reflection of the time than of a permanent French predicament: life is made miserable for teen-agers and sweetens only in late maturity. There are very few Americans who are not haunted by youth and a belief in the superior happiness of teen-age life. This is not because Americans are sold on this idea by mass culture but because Americans are generally pretty happy, or anyway feel alive, in high school: we have sex, freedom, drugs, music, some money, and not very much schoolwork. There are few shocks as great for an American as the first day of work.

In France, on the other hand, it is the young who are anxious and careworn. The French are taught as children something that Americans learn only after college, and that is the unappeasable power of arbitrary authority. It is not until you have graduated from school, passed your *bac*, gone through a university, moved out, got your job, and settled into your career that the wine and sex and money and security begin. At that moment, for one thing, the state ceases to be an instructor-oppressor and becomes a protector. A touching moment in Houellebecq's novel occurs when Michel, on the brink of his great discovery, receives a letter from his scientist boss explaining that "according to Article 66 of the interior regulations of the CNRS"—the scientific research institute—"he will have to apply for his reintegration, or the extension of his sabbatical, two months before its expiration." Even in apocalyptic science fiction, the French author feels the need to explain the precise nature of his character's bureaucratic regime.

The shift between the temptations of anarchism and the comfort of authoritarianism is one you can see at the Christmas windows, too. Outside the Printemps department store, on the Right Bank, the little platforms that children can mount to get a better view of the windows are unsupervised, and have become crazed, anarchic "sites of contestation," to use the postmodern term, while the parents look on unconcerned or encourage the kids to go wherever they can. Meanwhile, a block away, in front of the Galeries Lafayette, one of the local Christmastime *stewards urbains,* in uniform, tells the children how to get close to the windows and which way to walk once they're there: directing traffic, with no appeal. Everyone meekly obeys.

THIS is, in many ways, the last French Christmas. Next year, the euro kicks in, and de-facto political union with a dominant Germany will be the prime fact of French life. Politics are placid; the government is popular. Even the National Front, favorite bogeyman of the French left and of American journalists, has been split by internal squabbles, and this at a moment when its American counterparts seem to be running the country. (Many French writers have noted the relation between the Council of Conservative Citizens, supported by the Georgia congressman Bob Barr, and the National Front, to which the Council gave a Confederate flag.) A game called "Euromind" has been stacked up at Printemps, but the stacks remain untouched. People are buying "Action Man" and "Batman" figures.

Yet, while the liberal imperium remains in force, what Bourdieu's philosophizing and the lycéens' strike and Houellebecq's novel illustrate is the inability of "liberal" thought to take hold in Paris. Though the language is Marxist, and the hoped-for transcendence often wistfully Buddhist (Buddhism is the fastest-growing religion in France), the moral landscape of French dissent remains Catholic. What is memorable in Houellebecq's book is not the pseudo-scientific incantations, or the potted "theories," but the depth of feeling, the authentic disgust with fin-de-siècle liberal materialism. The scathing, sarcastic loathing for consumer society and its rituals—for women's magazines, gyms, night clubs, Club Med—gives real pathos to the book.

When the Wall fell, it seemed as if the hard ideological core of European anti-liberalism would fall with it. What no one could have foreseen is that the left, torn from its certainties, would still keep its faith. Christianity, after all, survived the failure of its first millennium rather well. It may be that the failure of anti-liberal thought to "work" at all in the real world will, far from marking it for the knacker's yard, define the moment when it passes from a model to a "metaphysic," in Houellebecq's sense—from an actual political program to a permanent form of poetic dissent. Sooner or later, liberalism points the way to the Christmas window, and what looks like an animated dance of joy to some of us can also, apparently, look like the forced playacting of mechanical dolls, jerking on invisible wires. It seems to depend which side of the window you think you're on. ♦

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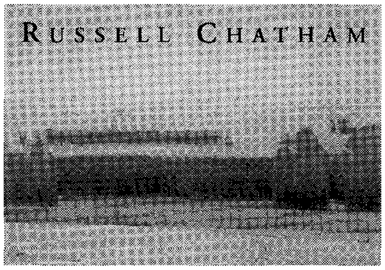

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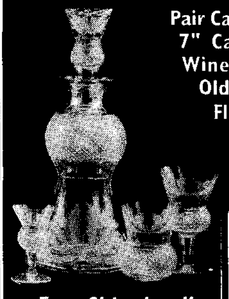

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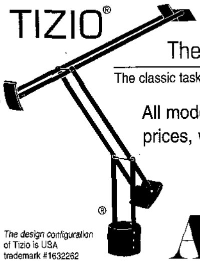

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WINTER TALE

THE BLOOD BAY

An Irish folktale set in the wilds of Wyoming.

BY ANNIE PROULX

THE winter of 1886-87 was terrible. Every goddam history of the High Plains says so. There were great stocks of cattle on overgrazed land during the droughty summer. Early wet snow froze hard, so the cattle couldn't break through the crust to the grass. Blizzards and freeze-eye cold followed, the gaunt bodies of cattle piling up in draws and coulees.

PHOTOGRAPH BY CHIP SIMONS

A young Montana cowboy, somewhat vain, had skimped on coat and mittens and put all his wages into a fine pair of handmade boots. He crossed into Wyoming Territory thinking it would be warmer, for it was south of where he was. That night, he froze to death on Powder River's bitter west bank, that stream of famous dimensions—an inch deep, a mile wide, and she flows uphill from Texas.

The next afternoon, three cowpunchers from the Box Spring outfit near Suggs rode past his corpse, blue as a whetstone and half buried in snow. They were savvy and salty. They wore blanket coats, woolly chaps, sheepskin mitts, and grease-wool scarves tied over their hats and under their bristled chins, and two of them were fortunate enough to park their feet in good boots and heavy socks. The third, Dirt Sheets, a cross-eyed drinker of hair oil, was all right on top, but his luck was running muddy near the bottom, no socks and his curl-toe boots cracked and holed.

"That can a corn beef's wearin my size boots," Sheets said, and got off his horse for the first time that day. He pulled at the Montana cowboy's left boot, but it was frozen on. The right one didn't come off any easier.

"Son of a sick steer in a snowbank," he said. "I'll cut em off and thaw em after supper." Sheets pulled out a bowie knife and sawed through Montana's shins just above the boot tops, put the booted feet in his saddlebags, admiring the tooled leather and top-stitched hearts and clubs. They rode on down the river looking for strays, found a dozen bogged in deep drifts, and lost most of the daylight getting them out.

"Too late to try for the bunkhouse. Old Man Grice's shack is somewheres up along. He's bound a have a hot stove." The temperature was dropping, so cold that spit crackled in the air and a man didn't dare piss for fear he'd be rooted fast until spring. They agreed it must be forty below and more, the wind scything up a nice Wyoming howler.

They found the shack four miles north. Old Man Grice opened the door a crack.

"Come on in, puncher or rustler, I don't care."

"We'll put our horses up. Where's the barn?"

"Barn. Never had one. There's a lean-to out there behind the woodpile should keep em from blowin away or maybe freezin. I got my two horses in here beside the dish cupboard. I pamper them babies somethin terrible. Sleep where you can find a space, but I'm tellin you, don't bother that blood bay none. He'll mull you up and spit you out. He's a spirited steed. Pull up a chair and have some a this son-of-a-bitch stew."

It was a fine evening, eating, drinking and playing cards, swapping lies, the stove kicking out heat, Old Man Grice's spoiled horses sighing in comfort. The only disagreeable fact was that their host cleaned them out, took them for three dollars and four bits. Around midnight, Grice blew out the lamp and got into his bunk and the three punchers stretched out on the floor. Sheets set his trophies behind the stove, laid his head on his saddle, and went to sleep.

He woke half an hour before daylight, recalled it was his mother's birthday and if he wanted to telegraph a filial sentiment to her he would have to ride faster than chain lightning with the links snapped, for the Overland office closed at noon. He checked his grisly trophies, found them thawed, and pulled the boots and socks off the originals, drew them onto his own pedal extremities. He threw the bare Montana feet and his old boots in the corner near the dish cupboard, slipped out like a falling feather, saddled his horse, and rode away. The wind was low, and the fine cold air refreshed him.

Old Man Grice was up with the sun, grinding coffee beans and frying bacon. He glanced down at his rolled-up guests and said, "Coffee's ready." The blood bay stamped and kicked at something that looked like a man's foot. Old Man Grice took a closer look.

"There's a bad start to the day," he said. "It is a man's foot, and there's the other." He counted the sleeping guests. There were only two of them.

"Wake up, survivors, for God's sake wake up and get up."

The two punchers rolled out, stared wild-eyed at the old man, who was fairly frothing, pointing at the feet on the floor behind the blood bay.

"He's ate Sheets. Ah, I knew he was a hard horse, but to eat a man whole. You savage bugger," he screamed at the blood bay and drove him out into the scorching cold. "You'll never eat human meat again. You'll sleep out with the blizzards and wolves, you hell-bound fiend." Secretly, he was pleased to own a horse with the sand to eat a raw cowboy.

The leftover Box Spring riders squinted at Old Man Grice, hitched at their gun belts.

"Ah, boys, for God's sake, it was a terrible accident. I didn't know what a brute of a animal was that blood bay. Let's keep this to ourselves. Sheets was no prize, and I've got forty gold dollars says so, and the three and four bits I took off a you last night. Eat your bacon, don't make no trouble. There's enough trouble in the world without no more."

No, they wouldn't make trouble, and they put the heavy money in their saddlebags, drank a last cup of hot coffee, saddled up, and rode out into the grinning morning.

When they saw Sheets that night at the bunkhouse, they nodded, congratulated him on his mother's birthday, but said nothing about blood bays or forty-three dollars and four bits. The arithmetic stood comfortable. ♦

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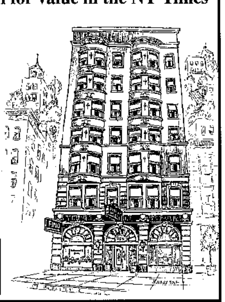

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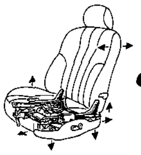

to make the seats even more comfortable, engineers added an adjustable lumbar support.

*The Chrysler Concorde was the highest-ranked premium midsize car in the J.D. Power and Associates 1998 Initial Quality Study 2.SM Study is based on a total of 58,117 consumer respons

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FICTION

CRÈCHE

A Midwestern Christmas.

BY RICHARD FORD

FAITH is not driving them, her mother, Esther, is. In the car it's the five of them. The family. On their way to Snow Mountain Highlands—Sandusky, Ohio, to northern Michigan—to ski. It's Christmas, or nearly. No one wants to spend Christmas alone.

The five include Faith, who's the motion-picture lawyer, arrived from California; her mother, who's sixty-four and who's thoughtfully volunteered to drive. Roger, Faith's sister's husband, a guidance counsellor at Sandusky J.F.K. And Roger's two girls: Jane and Marjorie, ages eight and six. Daisy, the girls' mom, Faith's younger sister, Roger's estranged wife, is a presence but not along. She is in rehab in a large Midwestern city that is not Chicago or Detroit.

Outside, beyond a long, treeless expanse of frozen white winterscape, Lake Michigan suddenly becomes visible. It is pale blue with a thin fog hovering just above its metallic surface. The girls are chatting chirpily in the back seat. Roger is beside them reading *Skier* magazine. No one is arguing.

Florida would've been a much nicer holiday alternative, Faith thinks. Epcot for the girls. The Space Center. Satellite Beach. Fresh fish. The ocean. She is paying for everything and does not even like to ski. But it has been a hard year for everyone, and someone has had to take charge. If they'd all gone to Florida, she'd have ended up broke.

Her basic character strength, Faith believes, watching what seems to be a nuclear power plant coming up on the left, is the feature that makes her a first-rate lawyer: an undeterrable willingness to see things as capable of being made better. If someone at the studio, a V.P. in marketing, for example, wishes a quick exit from a totally binding yet surprisingly uncomfortable obligation—say, a legal contract—then Faith's your girl. Faith the doer. Your very own optimist. Faith the blond beauty with smarts. A client's dream with great tits. Her own tits. Just give her a day on your problem.

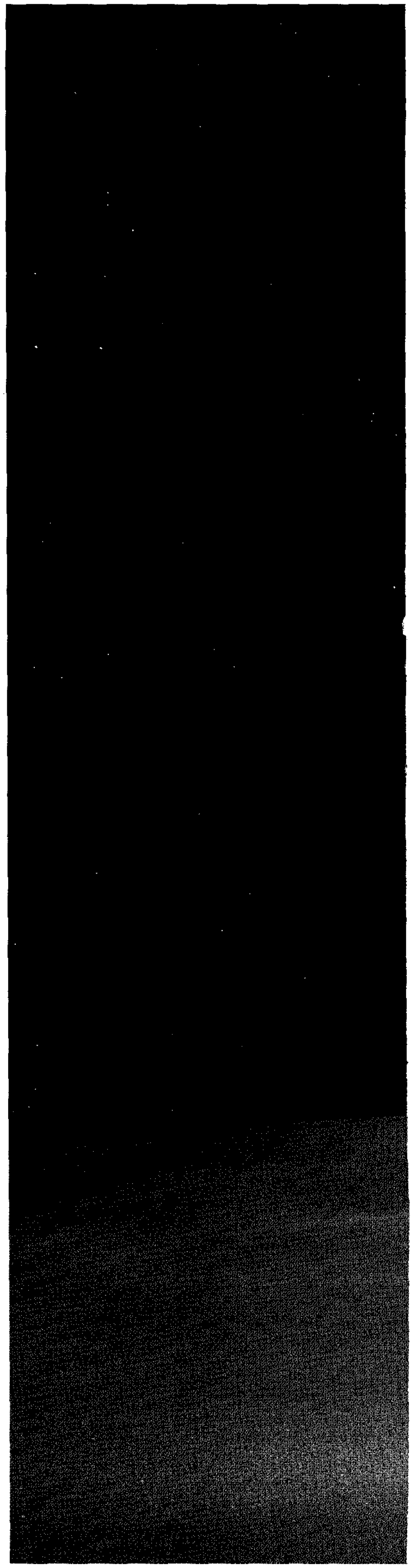
Her sister is a perfect case in point. Daisy has been able to admit her serious methamphetamine problems, but only after her biker boyfriend, Vince, has been made a guest of the State of Ohio. And here Faith has had a role to play, beginning with phone calls, then attorneys, a restraining order, then later the state police and handcuffs. Going through Daisy's apartment with their mother, in search of clothes Daisy could wear with dignity into rehab, Faith found dildos; six, in all—one, for some reason, under the kitchen sink. These she put into a black plastic grocery bag and left in the neighbor's street garbage just so her mother wouldn't know. Her mother is up-to-date, she feels, but not necessarily interested in dildos. For Daisy's going-in outfit they decided on a dark jersey shift and some new white Adidas.

The downside on the character issue, Faith understands, is the fact that, at almost thirty-seven, nothing's particularly solid in her life. She is very patient (with assholes), very ready to forgive (assholes), very good to help behind the scenes (with assholes). Her glass is always half full. Stand and ameliorate, her motto. Anticipate change. The skills of the law once again only partly in synch with the requirements of life.

A tall silver smokestack with blinking silver lights on top and several gray megaphone-shaped cooling pots around it all come into view on the frozen lakefront. Dense chalky smoke drifts out the top of each.

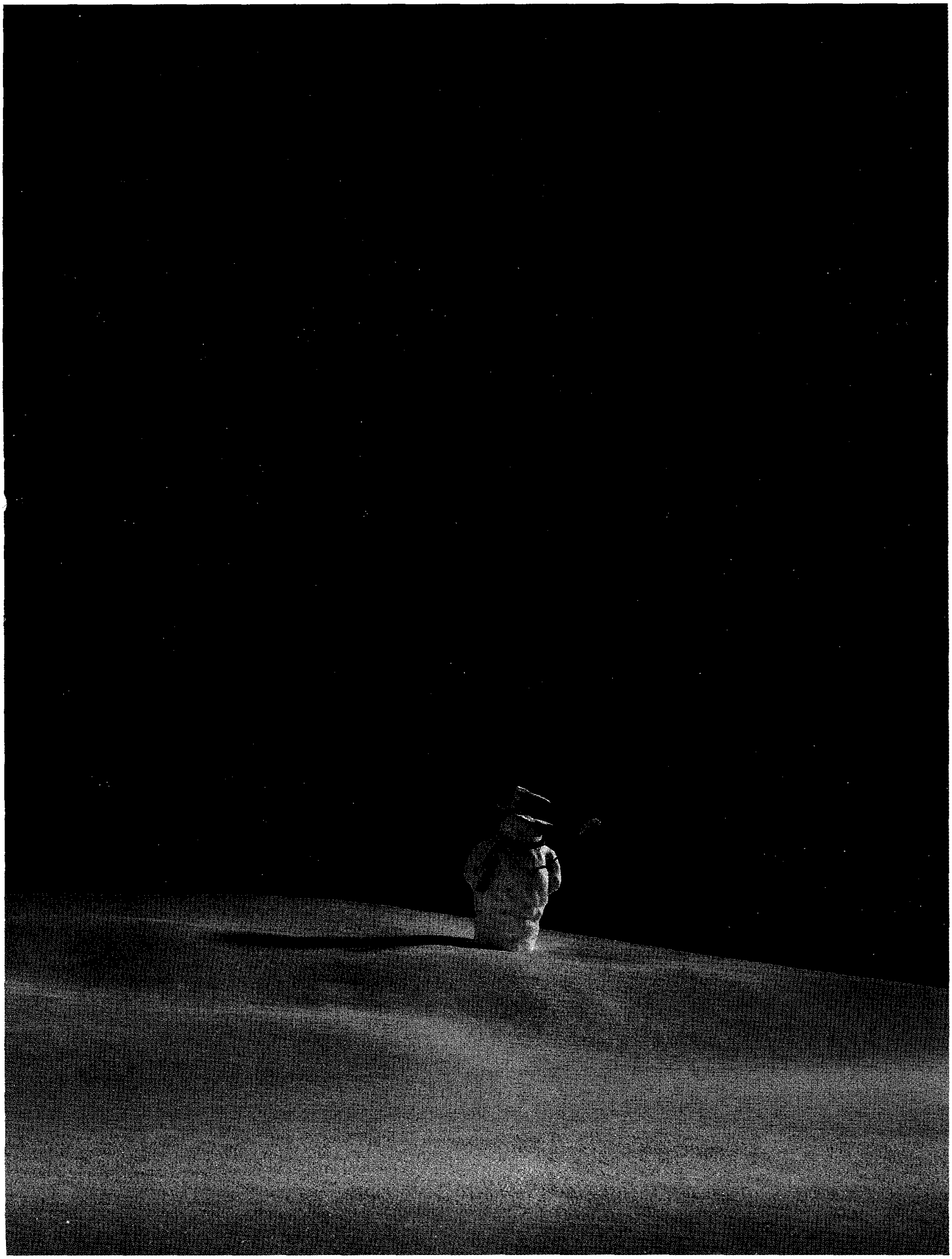
"What's that big thing?" Jane or possibly Marjorie says, peering out the back-seat window. It is too warm in the cranberry-colored Suburban Faith rented at the Cleveland airport, plus the girls are chewing watermelon-smelling gum. Everyone could get carsick.

"That's a rocket ship ready to blast off to outer space. Would you girls like



Somewhere there must be a better pla

DIDIER MASSARD "THE TWELFTH OF DECEMBER," 1993; JULIE SAUL GALLERY



eat, where you don't pay with coupons and the ceiling beams aren't painted pink and light green and Bavarian purple.

to hitch a ride on it?" Roger says. Roger, the brother-in-law, is the friendly-funny neighbor in a family sitcom, although he isn't funny. He is small and blandly not-quite-handsome and wears a brush cut and black horn-rimmed glasses. And he is loathsome—though only in subtle ways, like TV actors Faith has known. He is also thirty-seven and likes pastel cardigans and suède shoes. Faith has noticed he is, oddly enough, quite tanned.

"It is not a rocket ship," Jane, the older child, says and puts her forehead to the foggy window then pulls back and considers the smudge mark she's left.

"It's a pickle," Marjorie says.

"And shut up," Jane says. "That's a nasty expression."

"It isn't," Marjorie says.

"Is that a new word your mother taught you?" Roger asks and smirks. "I bet it is. That'll be her legacy." On the cover of *Skier* is a photograph of Alberto Tomba wearing an electric-red outfit, running the giant slalom at Kitzbühel. The headline says, "GOING TO EXTREMES."

"It better not be," Faith's mother says from behind the wheel. Faith's mother is unusually thin. Over the years she has actually shrunk from a regular, plump size 12 to the point that she now swims inside her clothes, and, on occasion, can resemble a species of testy bird. There are problems with her veins and her digestion. But nothing is medically wrong. She eats.

"It's an atom plant where they make electricity," Faith says, and smiles back approvingly at the nieces, who are staring out the car window, losing interest. "We use it to heat our houses."

"We don't like that kind of heat, though," Faith's mother says. Her seat is pushed up, seemingly to accommodate her diminished size. Even her seat belt hangs on her. Esther was once a science teacher and has been Green since before it was chic.

"Why not?" Jane says.

"Don't you girls learn anything in school?" Roger says, flipping pages in his *Skier*.

"Their father could always instruct them," Esther says. "He's in education."

"Guidance," Roger says. "But touché."

"What's 'touché'?" Jane says and wrinkles her nose.

"It's a term used in fencing," Faith says. She likes both little girls immensely, would like to punish Roger for ever speaking sarcastically to them.

"What's fencing?" Marjorie asks.

"It's a town in Michigan where they make fences," Roger says. "Fencing, Michigan. It's near Lansing."

"No, it's not," Faith says.

"Then, you tell them," Roger says. "You know everything. You're the lawyer."

"It's a game you play with swords," Faith says. "Only no one gets killed or hurt." In every way, she despises Roger and wishes he'd stayed in Sandusky. Though she couldn't bring the girls without him. Letting her pay for everything is Roger's way of saying thanks.

"Now, all your lives you'll remember where you heard fencing explained first and by whom," Roger says in a nice-nasty voice. "When you're at Harvard—"

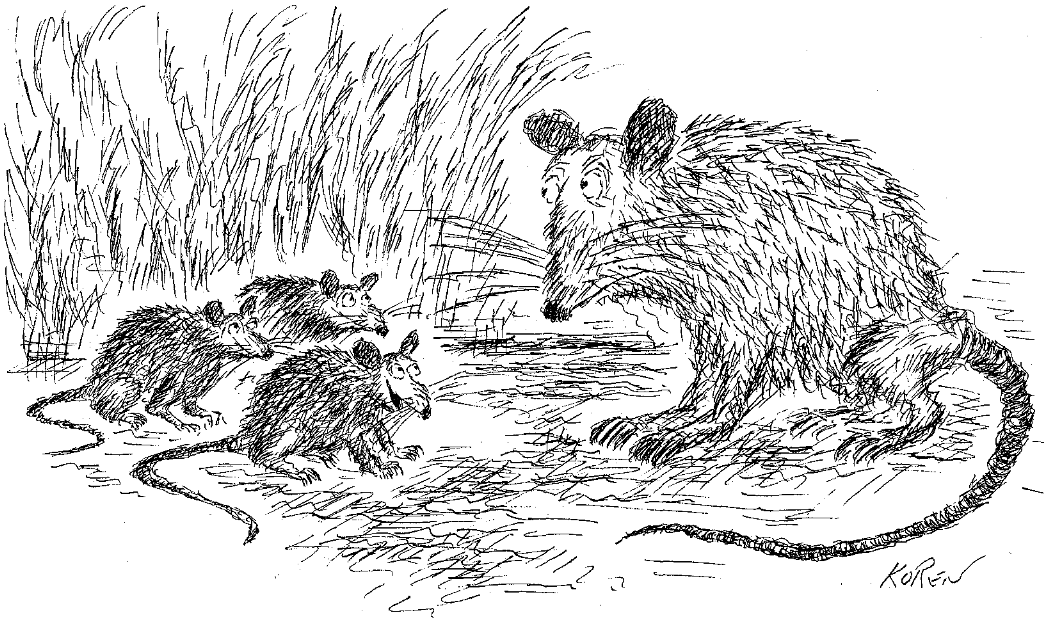
"You didn't know," Jane says.

"That's wrong. I did know. I absolutely knew," Roger says. "I was just having some fun. Christmas is a fun time."

FAITH'S love life has not been going well. She has always wanted children-with-marriage, but neither of these things has quite happened. Either the men she's liked haven't liked children, or else the men who've loved her and wanted to give her all she longed for haven't seemed worth it. Practicing law for a movie studio has accordingly become extremely engrossing. Time has gone by. A series of mostly courteous men has entered but then departed, all for one reason or another unworkable: married, frightened, divorced, all three together. Lucky is how she has chiefly seen herself. She goes to the gym every day, leases an expensive car, lives alone at the beach in a rental owned by an ex-teen-age movie star who is a friend's brother and has H.I.V. A deal.

Late last spring she met a man. A stock-market hotsy-totsy with a house on Block Island. Jack. Jack flew to Block Island from the city in his own plane, had never been married at age roughly forty-six. She flew out a few times with him, met his stern-looking sisters, the pretty, social mom. There was a big blue rambling beach house facing the sea. Rose hedges, sandy pathways to secret dunes where you could swim naked—something she especially liked, though the sisters were astounded. The father was there, but was sick and would soon die, so that things were generally on hold. Jack did beaucoup business in London. Money was not a problem. Maybe when the father departed they could be married, Jack had almost suggested. But until then she could travel with him whenever she could get away. Scale back a little on the expectation side. He wanted children, would get to California often. It could work.

One night a woman



"Mom, where are we on the food chain?"

called. Greta she said her name was. Greta was in love with Jack. She and Jack had had a fight, but Jack still loved her. It turned out Greta had pictures of Faith and Jack in New York together. Who knew who took them? A little bird. One was a picture of Faith and Jack exiting Jack's apartment building. Another was of Jack helping Faith out of a yellow taxi. One was of Faith, all alone, at the Park Avenue Café, eating seared swordfish. One was of Jack and Faith kissing in the front seat of an unrecognizable car—also in New York.

Jack liked particular kinds of sex in very particular kinds of ways, Greta said. She guessed Faith knew all about that by now. But "best not to make long-range plans" was somehow the message.

When asked, Jack conceded there was a problem. But he would solve it. Tout de suite (though he was preoccupied with his father's approaching death). Jack was a tall, smooth-faced, handsome man with a shock of lustrous, mahogany-colored hair. Like a clothing model. He smiled, and everyone felt better. He'd gone to Harvard, played squash, rowed, debated, looked good in a brown suit and oldish shoes. He was trustworthy. It still seemed workable.

But Greta called more times. She sent pictures of herself and Jack together. Recent pictures, since Faith had come on board. It was harder than he thought to get untangled, Jack admitted. Faith would need to be patient. Greta was someone he'd once "cared about very much." Might've even married. But she had problems, yes. And he wouldn't just throw her over. He wasn't that kind of man, something she, Faith, would be glad about in the long run. Meanwhile there was his sick father. The patriarch. And his mother. And the sisters.

That had been plenty.

Snow Mountain Highlands is a small ski resort, but nice. Family, not flash. Faith's mother found it as a "Holiday Getaway" in the Sandusky *Pennysaver*. The getaway involves a condo, weekend lift tickets, coupons for three days of Swedish smorgasbord in the Bavarian-style inn. Although the deal is for two people only. The rest have to pay. Faith will sleep with her mother in the "Master Suite." Roger can share the twin bedroom with the girls.

When Faith's sister Daisy began to be interested in Vince the biker, Roger had simply "receded." Her and Roger's sex life had lost its effervescence, Daisy confided. They had started life as a model couple in a suburb of Sandusky, but eventually—after some time and two kids—happiness ended and Daisy had been won over by Vince, who did amphetamines and, more significantly, sold them. That—Vince's arrival—was when sex had gotten really good, Daisy said. Faith silently believes Daisy envied her movie connections and movie life and her Jaguar convertible, and basically threw her life away (at least until rehab) as a way of simulating Faith's—only with a biker. Eventually Daisy left home and gained forty-five pounds on a body that was already voluptuous, if short. Last summer, at the beach at Middle Bass Island, Daisy in a rage actually punched Faith in the chest when she suggested that Daisy might lose some weight, ditch Vince, and consider coming home. "I'm not like you," Daisy screamed, right out on the sand. "I fuck for pleasure. Not for business." Then she'd waddled into the tepid surf of Lake Erie, wearing a pink one-piece that boasted a frilly skirtlet. By then, Roger had the girls, courtesy of a court order.

Faith has had a sauna and is now thinking about phoning Jack wherever Jack is. Block Island. New York. London. She has no particular message to leave. Later she plans to go cross-country skiing under the moonlight. Just to be a full participant. Set a good example. For this she has brought her L.A. purchases: loden knickers, a green-brown-and-red sweater made in the Himalayas, and socks from Norway. No way does she plan to get cold.

In the living room her mother is having a glass of red wine and playing solitaire with two decks by the big picture window that looks down toward the crowded ski slope and ice rink. Roger is there on the bunny slope with Jane and Marjorie, but it's impossible to distinguish them. Red suits. Yellow suits. Lots of dads with kids. All of it soundless.

Her mother plays cards at high speed, flipping cards and snapping them down as if she hates the game and wants it to be over. Her eyes are intent. She has put on a cream-colored neck brace. (The tension of driving has aggravated an old work-related injury.) And she is now wearing a Hawaii-print orange muumuu, which engulfs her. How long, Faith wonders, has her mother been shrinking? Twenty years, at least. Since Faith's father kicked the bucket.

"Maybe I'll go to Europe," her mother says, flicking cards ferociously with bony fingers. "That'd be adventurous, wouldn't it?"

Faith is at the window observing the expert slope. Smooth, wide pastures of snow framed by copses of beautiful spruces. Several skiers are zigzagging their way down, doing their best to be stylish. Years ago she came here with her high-school boyfriend. Eddie, a.k.a. Fast Eddie, which in some ways he was. Neither of them liked to ski, nor did they get out of bed to try. Now skiing reminds her of golf—a golf course made of snow.

"Maybe I'd take the girls out of school and treat us all to Venice," Esther goes on. "I'm sure Roger would be relieved."

Faith has spotted Roger and the girls on the bunny slope. Blue, green, yellow suits, respectively. Roger is pointing, giving detailed instructions to his daughters about ski etiquette. Just like any dad. She thinks she sees him laughing. It is hard to think of Roger as an average parent.

"They're too young for Venice," Faith says. From outside, she hears the rasp of a snow shovel and muffled voices.

"I'll take you, then," her mother says. "When Daisy clears rehab we can all three take in Europe. I always planned that."

Faith likes her mother. Her mother is no fool, yet still seeks ways to be generous. But Faith cannot complete a picture that includes herself, her diminished mother, and Daisy on the Champs-Élysées or the Grand Canal. "That's a nice idea," Faith says. She is standing beside her mother's chair, looking down at the top of her head. Her mother's head is small. Its hair is dark gray and not especially clean, but short and sparse. She has affected a very wide part straight down the middle. Her mother looks like a homeless woman, only with a neck brace.

"I was reading what it takes to get to a hundred," Esther says, neatening the cards on the glass tabletop in front of her. Faith has begun thinking of Jack again and what a peculiar species of creep he is. Jack Matthews still wears the Lobb cap-toe shoes he had made for him in college. Ugly, pretentious English shoes. "You have to be physically active," her mother continues. "You have to be an optimist, which I am. You have to stay interested in things, which I more or less do. And you have to handle loss well."

With all her concentration Faith tries not to wonder how she ranks on this scale. "Do you want to live to a hundred?" she asks her mother.

"Oh yes," Esther says. "Of course. You can't imagine it, that's all. You're too young. And beautiful. And talented." No irony. Irony is not her mother's specialty.

Outside, the men shovelling snow can be heard to say, "Hi, we're the Weather Channel." They are speaking to someone watching them out another window from another condo. "In winter the most innocent places can turn lethal," the same man says and laughs. "Colder'n a well-digger's dick, you bet," a second man's voice says. "That's today's forecast."

"The male appliance," her mother says pleasantly, fiddling with her cards. "That's it, isn't it? The whole mystery."

"So I'm told," Faith says.

"They were all women, though."

"Who was?"

"All the people who lived to be a hundred. You could do all the other things right. But you still needed to be a woman to survive."

"Lucky us," Faith says.

"Right. The lucky few."

This will be the girls' first Christmas without a tree or their mother. And Faith has attempted to improvise around this by arranging presents at the base of the large, plastic rubber-tree plant stationed against one of the empty white walls in the living room. She has brought a few red Christmas balls, a gold star, and a string of lights that promise to blink. "Christmas in Manila" could be a possible theme.

Outside, the day is growing dim. Faith's mother is napping. Roger has gone down to the Warming Shed for a mulled wine following his ski lesson. The girls are seated on the couch side by side, wearing their Lanz of Salzburg flannel nighties with matching smiling-bunny slippers. Green and yellow again, but with printed snowflakes. They have taken their baths together, with Faith present to supervise, then insisted on putting on their nighties early for their nap. To her, these two seem perfect angels and perfectly wasted on their parents.

"We know how to ski now," Jane says primly. They're watching Faith trim the rubber-tree plant. First the blinking lights (though there's no plug-in close enough), then the six red balls (one for each family member). Last will be the gold star. Possibly, Faith thinks, she is trying for too much. Though why not try for too much? It's Christmas.

"Would you two care to help me?" Faith smiles up at both of them from the floor where she is on her knees fiddling with the fragile green strand of tiny peaked bulbs she already knows will not light up.

"No," Jane says.

"I don't blame you," Faith says.

"Is Mommy coming here?" Marjorie says and blinks, crosses her tiny, pale ankles. She is sleepy and might possibly cry, Faith realizes.

"No, sweet," Faith says. "This Christmas Mommy is doing herself a big favor. So she can't do us one."

"What about Vince?" Jane says authoritatively. Vince is a subject that's been gone over before. Mrs. Argenbright, the girls' therapist, has taken special pains with the Vince issue. The girls have the skinny on Mr. Vince but

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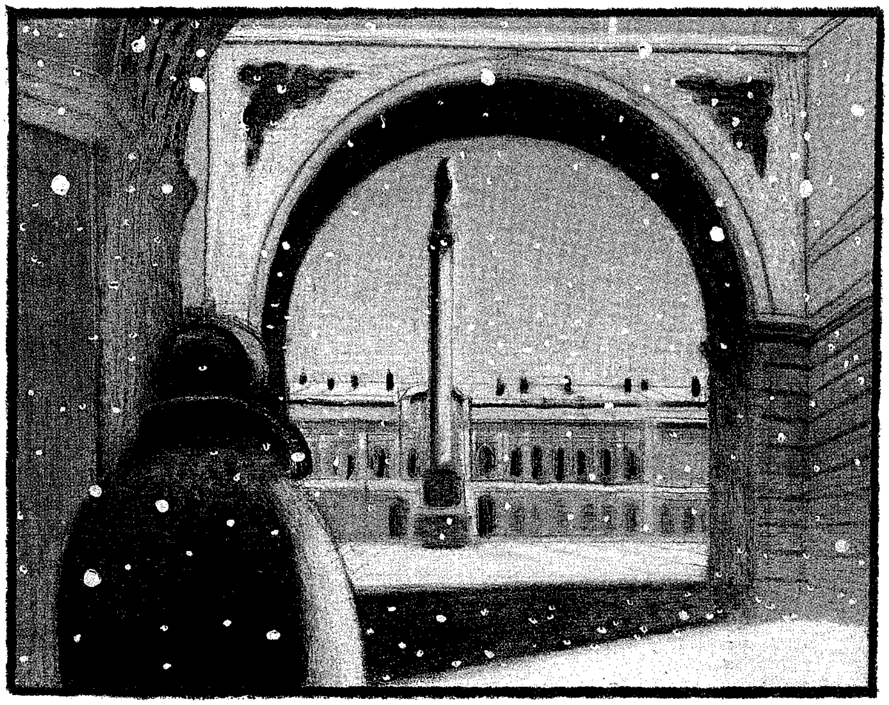
WINTER TALE

THE SNOW COLLECTORS



LORENZO MATTOTTI

St. Petersburg has one sea, one hundred and one islands, and endless rivers. There's no point in trying to count them: the sky is the source of the most important river—rain. Rain floods the city's canals; it saturates buildings, gardens, earth, and stones. All summer, it falls in a soft drizzle or in torrents. Occasionally, there are small interludes, during which the inhabitants of Petersburg raise their eyes and discover magical sunsets in maritime hues—green, gold, and violet—and gaze in astonishment at the beauty of their city: its palaces, arches, columns, spires, and cupolas. Everything is spectral, a watery gold trembling in the air and reflected in the waters. But these flashes of light are brief, and the most lasting impression, the image I have carried with me since childhood, is of a snow-filled black-and-white print.

The snow begins to fall in October. People watch for it impatiently, turning repeatedly to look outside. If only it would come! Everyone is tired of the cold rain that taps stupidly on windows and roofs. The houses are so drenched that they seem about to crumble into sand. But then, just as the gloomy sky sinks even lower, there comes the hope that the boring drum of water from the clouds will finally give way to a flurry of… and there it goes: tiny dry grains, at first, then an exquisitely carved flake, two, three ornate stars, followed by fat fluffs of snow, then more, more, more—a great store of cotton tumbling down.

Pure bliss! Winter! The sky, lightened of its load, brightens and seems to lift. The grimy cornices, roofs, and windowsills are covered instantly: everything vertical is black, everything horizontal white. The city becomes a sketch of itself, a huge map or blueprint that is slightly worn at the corners and intersections—a stage set, the ideal landscape this city was supposed to be. Children race outdoors and tramp across the thin white layer as if it were a blank sheet of paper, leaving behind clear black footprints. Look a little closer and those comments they've stomped out in the snow will be legible; another minute and the footnotes will arrange themselves into a text, an ode to winter, a hymn to freedom.

But the snow collectors have already started out. Frightening censors, they are led by a crazy machine that looks like a lobster with an escalator on its shoulder. A driver peers out with beady eyes while the machine's claws rake in the snow with circular movements. The snow, so new, fresh, free, and precious, is grabbed by the greedy claws and spat back out onto the escalator. From there, it travels up the lobster's shoulder and, pressed into tight clumps, drops into a dump truck that rides quietly along behind the crustacean. The machine, with its metal plow and whirling claws, scrapes along the ground, baring the asphalt—taking away our gift and leaving only blackness behind. The grownups call it a Vuchetich, after a rich Soviet sculptor, a government favorite, who has covered the country with hideous, skyscraper-high monstrosities. He's probably paid by the meter, which is why his statues are so tall; and he rakes in money as fast as the machine collects snow.

The Vuchetich moves on, but the snow keeps falling in its wake. The city slowly recovers from the theft, replenishes itself, emerges whole, stubborn, unconquered, an etching on white paper, as it was forty years ago, during my childhood—a sublime and indifferent engraving, unaffected by any commentary. —TATYANA TOLSTAYA

(Translated, from the Russian, by Jamey Gambrell.)

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wish to be given it again, since they like him more than their father.

"Vince is a guest of the State of Ohio right now," Faith says. "You remember that? It's like he's in college."

"He's not in college," Jane says.

"Does he have a tree where he is?" Marjorie asks.

"Not *in* his house, like you do," Faith says. "Let's talk about happier things than Mr. Vince, O.K.?"

What furniture the room contains conforms to the Danish style. A raised, metal-hooded, red-enamel-painted fireplace has a paper message from the condo owners taped to it, advising that smoke damage will cause renters to lose their security deposit. The owners are residents of Grosse Pointe Farms, and are people of Russian extraction. Of course, there's no fireplace wood except for what the furniture could offer.

"I think you two should guess what you're getting for Christmas," Faith says, carefully draping lightless lights on the stiff plastic branches. Taking pains.

"In-lines. I already know," Jane says and crosses her ankles like her sister. They are a jury disguised as an audience. "I don't have to wear a helmet, though."

"But are you sure of that?" Faith glances over her shoulder and gives them a smile she has seen movie stars give to strangers. "You could always be wrong."

"I'd better be right," Jane says unpleasantly, with a frown very much like one her mom uses.

"Santa's bringing me a disk player," Marjorie says. "It'll come in a small box. I won't even recognize it."

"You two're too smart for your britches," Faith says. She is quickly finished stringing Christmas lights. "But you don't know what *I* brought you." Among other things, she, too, has brought a disk player and an expensive pair of in-line skates. They are in the Suburban and will be returned in L.A. She has also brought movie videos. Twenty in all, including "Star Wars" and "Sleeping Beauty." Daisy has sent them each fifty dollars.

"You know," Faith says, "I remember once a long, long time ago, my dad and I and your mom went out in the woods and cut a tree for Christmas. We didn't buy a tree, we cut it down with an axe."

Jane and Marjorie stare at her as if they already know this story. The TV is not turned on in the room. Perhaps, Faith thinks, they don't understand someone actually talking to them—live action presenting its own unique problems.

"Do you want to hear the story?"

"Yes," Marjorie, the younger sister, says. Jane sits watchful and silent on the orange Danish sofa. Behind her on the white wall is a framed print of Brueghel's "Return of the Hunters," which after all is Christmassy.

"Well," Faith says. "Your mother and I—we were only nine and ten—we picked out the tree we desperately wanted to be our tree, but our dad said no, that that tree was too tall to fit inside our house. We should choose another one. But we both said, 'No, this one's perfect. This is the best one.' It was green and pretty and had a perfect shape. So our dad cut it down with his axe, and we dragged it through the woods and tied it on top of our car and brought it back to Sandusky." Both girls have now become sleepy. There has been too much excitement, or else not enough. Their mother is in rehab. Their dad is an asshole. They're in Michigan. Who wouldn't be sleepy? "Do you want to know what happened after that?" Faith asks. "When we got the tree inside?"

"Yes," Marjorie says politely.

"It was too big," Faith says. "It was much, much too tall. It couldn't even stand up in our living room. And it was too wide. And our dad got really mad at us because we'd killed a beautiful living tree for a bad reason, and because we hadn't listened to him and thought we knew everything just because we knew what we wanted."

Faith suddenly doesn't know why she's telling this particular story to these innocent sweeties who do not particularly need an object lesson. So she simply stops. In the real story, of course, her father took the tree and threw it out the door into the back yard, where it stayed for weeks and turned brown. There was crying and accusations. Her father went straight to a bar and got drunk. And later their mother went to the Safeway and bought a small tree that fit and which the three of them trimmed without the aid of their father. It was waiting, trimmed, when he came home smashed. The story had usually been one others found humor in. This time all the humor seemed lacking.

"Do you want to know how the story turned out?" Faith says, smiling brightly for the girls' benefit, but feeling completely defeated.

"I do," Marjorie says.

"We put it outside in the yard and put lights on it so our neighbors could share our big tree with us. And we bought a smaller tree for the house at the Safeway. It was a sad story that turned out good."

"I don't believe it," Jane says.

"Well, you should believe it," Faith says, "because it's true. Christmases are special. They always turn out wonderfully if you give them a chance and use your imagination."

Jane shakes her head as Marjorie nods hers. Marjorie wants to believe. Jane, Faith thinks, is a classic older child. Like herself.

"DID you know"—this was one of Greta the girlfriend's cute messages left for her on her voice mail in Los Angeles—"did you know that Jack hates—hates—to have his dick sucked? Hates it with a passion. Of course you didn't. How could you? He always lies about it. Oh, well. But if you're wondering why he never comes, that's why. It's a big turnoff for him. I personally think it's his mother's fault, not that she ever did it to him, of course. I don't mean that. By the way, that was a nice dress last Friday. You're very pretty. And really great tits. I can see why Jack likes you. Take care."

AT seven, the girls wake up from their naps and everyone is hungry at once. Faith's mother offers to take the two hostile Indians for a pizza, then on to the skating rink, while Roger and Faith share the smorgasbord coupons.

At seven-thirty, few diners have chosen the long, harshly lit, sour-smelling Tyrol Room. Most guests are outside awaiting the nightly Pageant of the Lights, in which members of the ski patrol ski down the expert slope holding lighted torches. It is a thing of beauty but takes time getting started. At the very top of the hill, a great Norway spruce has been lighted in the Yuletide tradition just as in the untrue version of Faith's story. All is viewable from the Tyrol Room through a big picture window.

Faith does not want to eat with Roger, who is slightly hung over from his gluhwein and a nap. Conversation that she would find offensive could easily occur; something on the subject of her sister, the girls' mother—Roger's (still) wife. But she is trying to keep up a Christmas spirit. Do for others, etc.

Roger, she knows, dislikes her, possibly envies her, and is also attracted to her. Once, several years ago, he confided to her that he'd very much like to fuck her ears flat. He was drunk, and Daisy had not long before had Jane. Faith found a way not to acknowledge this offer. Later he told her he thought she was a lesbian. Having her know that just must've seemed like a good idea. A class act is the Roger.

The long, wide, echoing dining hall has crisscrossed ceiling beams painted pink and light green and purple—something apparently appropriate to Bavaria. There are long green tables with pink plastic folding chairs meant to promote good times and family fun. Somewhere else in the inn, Faith is certain, there is a better place to eat, where you don't pay with coupons and nothing's pink or purple.

Faith is wearing a shiny black Lycra bodysuit, over which she has put on her loden knickers and Norway socks. She looks superb, she thinks. With anyone but Roger this would be fun, or at least a hoot.

Roger sits across the long table, too far away to talk easily. In a room that can conveniently hold five hundred souls, there are perhaps ten scattered diners. No one is eating family style. Only solos and twos. Youthful inn employees in paper caps wait dismally behind the long smorgasbord steam table. Metal heat lamps with orange lights are overcooking the prime rib, of which Roger has taken a goodly portion. Faith has chosen only a few green lettuce leaves, a beet round, and two tiny ears of yellow corn. The sour smell makes eating unappealing.

"Do you know what I worry about?" Roger says, sawing around a triangle of glaucal gray roast-beef fat, using a comically small knife. His tone implies he and Faith lunch together daily and are picking up right where they've left off; as if they didn't hold each other in complete contempt.

"No," Faith says, "what?" Roger, she notices, has managed to hang on to his red smorgasbord coupon. The rule is you leave your coupon in the basket by the breadsticks. Clever Roger. Why, she wonders, is he tanned?

Roger smiles as though there's a lewd aspect to whatever it is that worries him. "I worry that Daisy's going to get so fixed up in rehab that she'll forget everything that's happened and want to be married again. To me, I mean. You know?" Roger chews as he talks. He wishes to seem earnest, his smile a serious, imploring, vacuous smile. Roger levelling. Roger owning up.

"Probably that won't happen," Faith says. "I just have a feeling." She no longer wishes to look at her salad. She does not have an eating disorder, she thinks, and could never have one.

"Maybe not." Roger nods. "I'd like to get out of guidance pretty soon, though. Start something new. Turn the page."

In truth, Roger is not bad-looking, only oppressively regular: small chin, small nose, small hands, small straight teeth—nothing unusual except his brown eyes, which are slightly too narrow, as if he had Finnish blood. Daisy married him, she said, because of his alarmingly big dick. That or, more important, lack of that, in her view, was why other marriages failed. When all else gave way, that would be there. Vince's, she'd observed, was even bigger. Ergo. It was to this quest Daisy had dedicated her life. This, instead of college.

"What exactly would you like to do next?" Faith says. She is thinking how satisfying it would be if Daisy came out of rehab and had forgotten everything, and that returning to how things were when they still sort of worked can often be the best solution.

"Well, it probably sounds crazy," Roger says, chewing, "but there's a company down in Tennessee that takes apart jetliners. For scrap. And there's big money in it. I imagine it's how the movie business got started. Just some harebrained scheme." Roger pokes macaroni salad with his fork. A single Swedish meatball remains on his plate.

"It doesn't sound crazy," Faith lies, then looks longingly at the smorgasbord table. Maybe she is hungry. Is the table full of food the smorgasbord, she wonders, or is eating it the smorgasbord? Roger has slipped his meal coupon back into a pocket. "Do you think you're going to do that?" she asks with reference to the genius plan of dismantling jet airplanes.

"With the girls in school, it'd be hard," Roger says, ignoring what would seem to be the obvious—that it is not a genius plan. Faith gazes around distractedly. She realizes no one else in the big room is dressed the way she is, which reminds her of who she is. She is not Snow Mountain Highlands. She is not even Sandusky. She is Hollywood. A fortress.

"I could take the girls for a while," she suddenly says. "I really wouldn't mind." She thinks of sweet Marjorie and sweet but unhappy Jane sitting on the Danish modern couch in their sweet nighties, watching her trim the rubber-tree plant. Just as instantly she thinks of Roger and Daisy being killed in an automobile crash. You can't help what you think.

"Where would they go to school?" Roger says, alert to something unexpected. Something he likes.

"I'm sorry?" Faith says, and flashes Roger, big-dick Roger, a second movie star's smile. She has let herself be distracted by the thought of his timely death.

"I mean where would they go to school?" Roger blinks. He is that alert.

"I don't know. Hollywood High, I guess. They have schools in California. I guess I could find one."

"I'd have to think about this," Roger lies decisively.

"O.K.," Faith says. Now that she has said this without any previous thought of ever saying anything like it, it immediately becomes part of everyday reality. She will soon become the girls' parent. Easy as that. "When you get settled in Tennessee you could have them back," she says without conviction.

"They probably wouldn't want to come back," Roger says. "Tennessee'd seem pretty dull after Hollywood."

"Ohio's dull. They like that."

"True," Roger says.

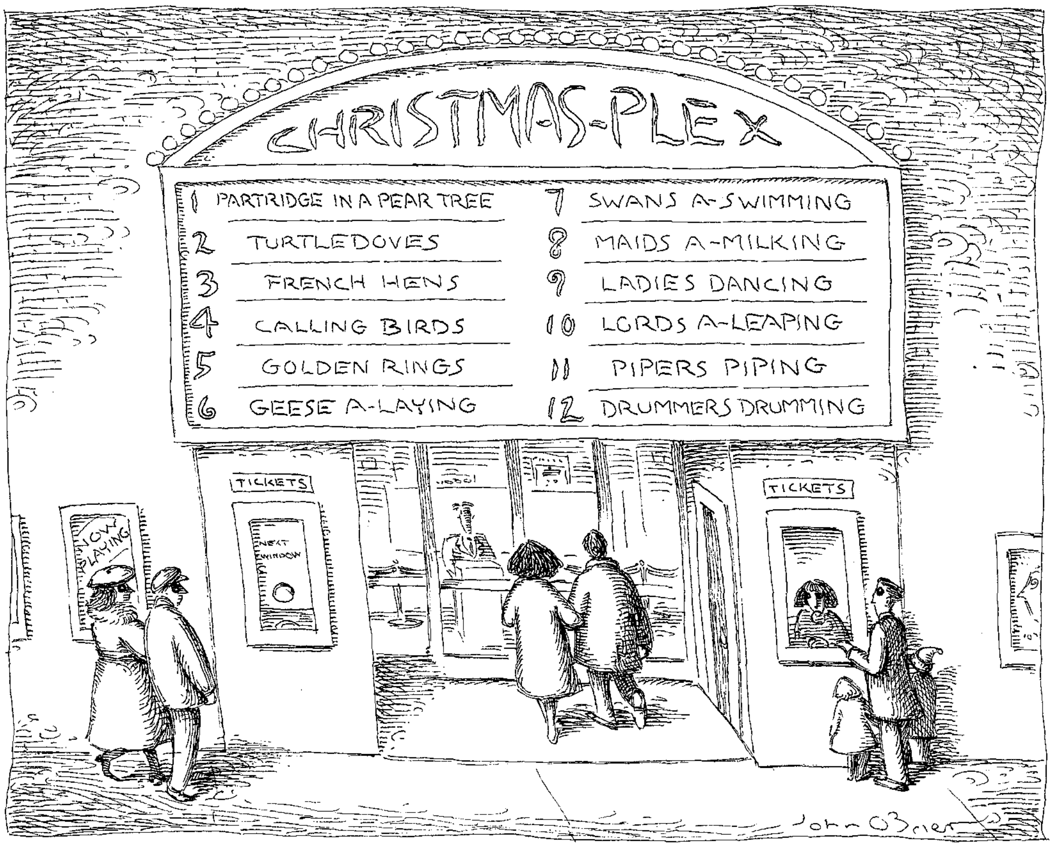
No one, of course, has thought to mention Daisy in preparing this new arrangement. Daisy, the mother. Though Daisy is committed elsewhere for the next little patch. And Roger needs to put "guidance" in the rearview mirror.

The Pageant of the Lights is just now under way—a ribbon of swaying torches swooshing down the expert course like an overflow of lava. All is preternaturally visible through the panoramic window. A large, bundled crowd has assembled at the hill's bottom, many members holding candles in scraps of paper like at a Grateful Dead concert. All other artificial light is extinguished, except for the big Christmas spruce at the top. The young smorgasbord attendants have gathered at the window to witness the pageant yet again. Some are snickering. Someone remembers to turn the lights off inside the Tyrol Room. Dinner is suspended.

"Do you downhill?" Roger asks, manning his empty plate in the half darkness. Things could really turn out great, Faith understands he's thinking. Eighty-six the girls. Dismantle plenty jets. Just be friendly.

"No, never," Faith says, dreamily watching the torchbearers schuss from side to side, a gradual sinuous dramaless tour down. "It scares me."

"You get used to it." Roger suddenly



reaches across the table where her hands rest on either side of her uneaten salad. He actually touches then pats one of these hands. Roger is her friend now. "And by the way," he says creepily, "thanks."

BACK in the condo, all is serene. Esther is still at the skating rink. Roger has wandered back to the Warming Shed. He has a girlfriend in Port Clinton. A former high-school counsellee, now divorced. He will be calling her, telling her about the new plans, telling her he wishes she were with him at Snow Mountain Highlands and that his family could be in Rwanda. Bobbie, her name is.

A call to Jack is definitely in order. But first Faith decides to slide the newly trimmed plastic rubber-tree plant nearer the window, where there's an outlet. When she plugs in, most of the little white lights pop cheerily on. Only a few do not, and in the box are replacements. Later, tomorrow, they can fix the star on top—her father's favorite ritual. "Now it's time for the star," he'd say. "The star of the wise men." Her father had been a musician, a woodwind specialist. A man of talents, and a drunk. A specialist also in women who were not his wife. He had taught committedly at a junior college to make all their ends meet. He had wanted her to become a lawyer, so naturally she became one. Daisy he had no specific plans for, so she became a drunk, and, sometime later, an energetic nymphomaniac. Eventually he had died, at home. The paterfamilias. After that her mother began to shrink. "I won't actually die, I intend just to evaporate" was how she put it when the subject arose. It made her laugh. She considered her decrease a natural consequence of loss.

Whether to call Jack in London or New York or Block Island is the question. Where is Jack? In London it was after midnight. In New York and Block Island it was the same as here. Half past eight. Though a message was still the problem. She could just say she was lonely; or had chest pains; or worrisome test results. (The last two of which would later need to clear up mysteriously.)

London, first. The flat in Sloane Terrace, a half block from the tube. They'd eaten breakfast at Oriel, then Jack had gone off to work in the City while she did the Tate, the Bacons

SHOWCASE BY KARL BISSINGER

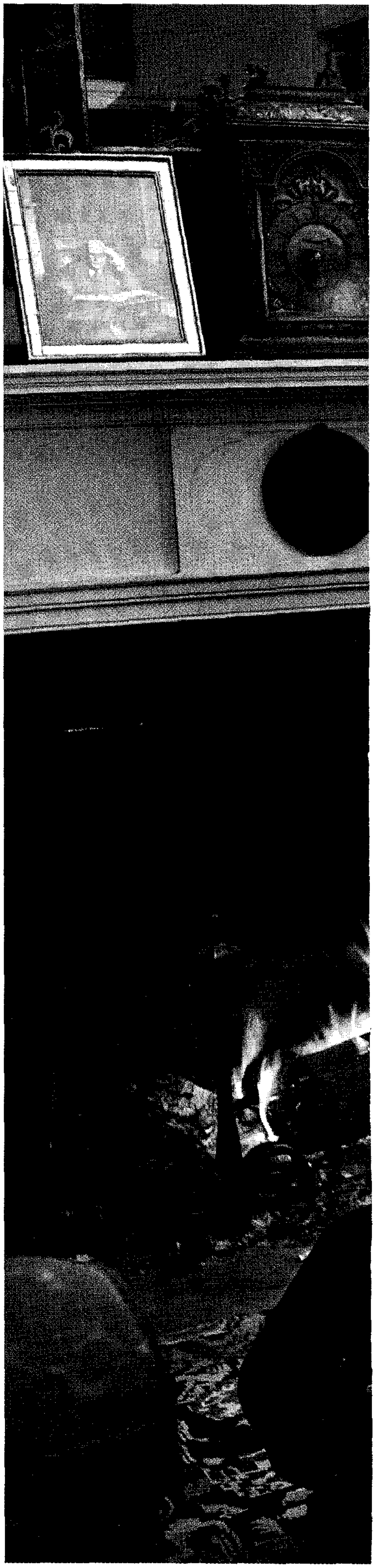
OBSERVER

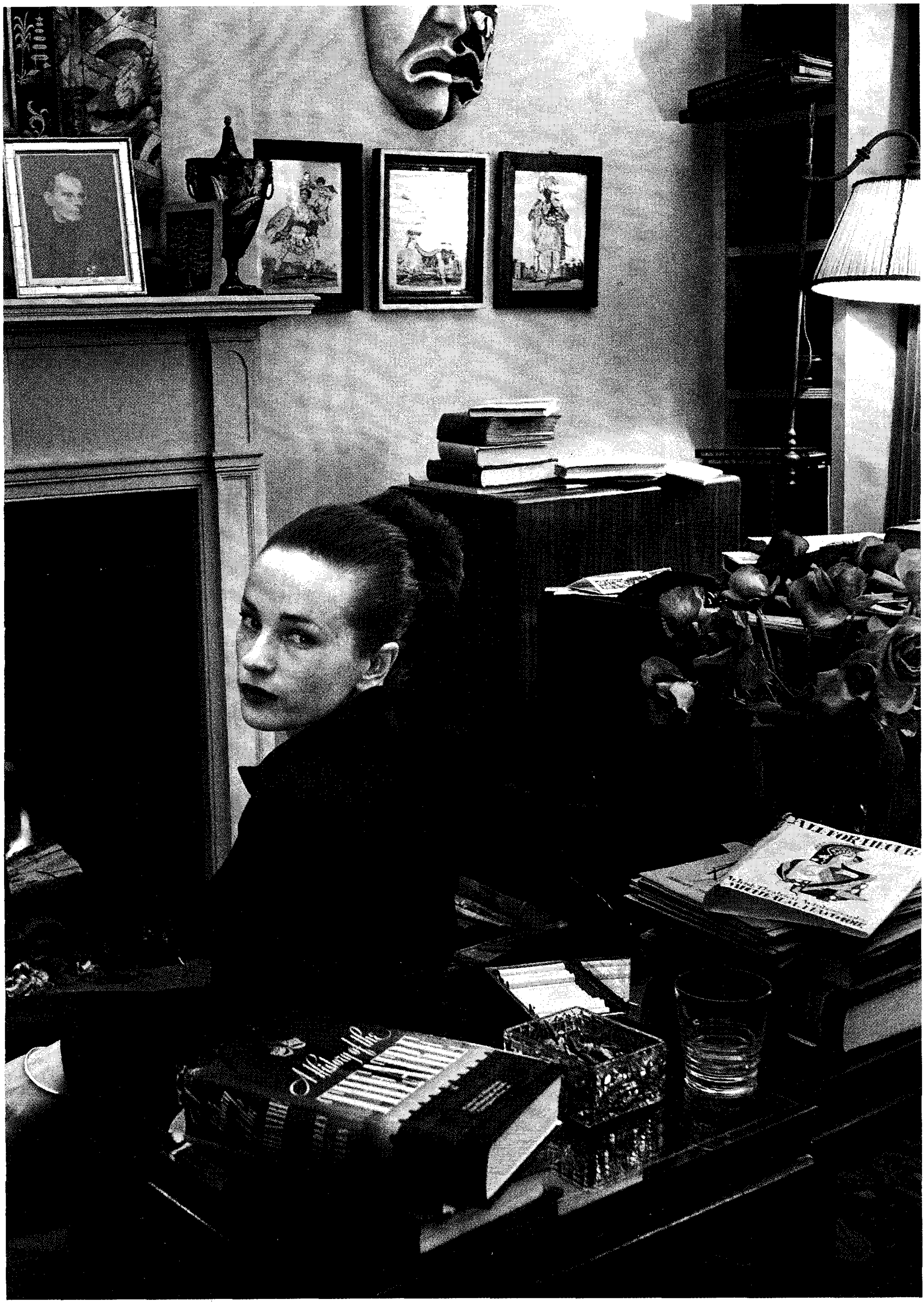
IN a note to a friend, Maeve Brennan once wrote, "These are our *lives*—I can't get over it," and for nearly thirty years, as the Long-Winded Lady, she registered this elusive fact in the pages of The Talk of the Town. Brennan's communications, most of them set in the neighborhoods she lived in—Times Square and Greenwich Village—began appearing in 1954. They catalogue the responses of an idiosyncratic flâneuse to ordinary events: the plight of caged birds in the five-and-dime, a little boy crying in the street, a scantily clad young woman slithering through the Latin Quarter. These pieces influenced successive generations of writers, and Mariner has just republished them, in an expanded collection entitled "The Long-Winded Lady," as well as Brennan's Irish stories, "The Springs of Affection."

Brennan was born in Dublin in 1916, and came to the United States as a teenager. The photograph at right was taken in 1949, at the apartment of the theatre critic Thomas Quinn Curtiss, just before she arrived at *The New Yorker*. She was married briefly to the gifted, unstable writer St. Clair McKelway, but for most of her life Brennan lived alone, moving restlessly about the city. Even though she remained here until her death, in 1993, she called herself "a traveller in residence," and a feeling of irresolution suffuses nearly everything she wrote. In the mid-seventies, she suffered a mental breakdown from which she never recovered.

In her last Talk piece, in the issue of January 5, 1981, Brennan, who had by then been in and out of hospitals, recalled a New Year's Eve in Dublin when, at midnight, all the neighbors stepped out into their front gardens to listen to the church bells ring in the year. "I must tell you now that I am praying to Almighty God for blessings on your house," she concluded, "with extra blessings to go with you whenever you leave the house, so that wherever you are you will be safe." Brennan was later sometimes spotted on the street, feeding birds or giving money to strangers, until, finally, she dropped out of sight.

—MARY HAWTHORNE





KARL BISSINGER, 1949

her specialty. So far from Snow Mountain Highlands—this is the sensation of dialling—a call going a great distance.

Ring-jing, ring-jing, ring-jing, ring-jing, ring-jing. Nothing.

There was a second number, for messages only, but she'd forgotten it. Call again to allow for a misdial. *Ring-jing, ring-jing, ring-jing. . . .*

New York, then. East Forty-ninth. Far, far east. The nice, small slice of river view. A bolt-hole he'd had since college. His freshman numerals framed on the wall. 1971. She'd gone to the trouble to have the bedroom redone. White everything. A smiling picture of her from the boat, framed in red leather. Another of them together at Cabo, on the beach. All similarly long distances from Snow Mountain Highlands.

Ring, ring, ring, ring. Then *click,* "Hi, this is Jack"—she almost speaks to his voice—"I'm not" etc., etc., etc., then a beep.

"Hi, Jack, it's me. Ummm, Faith. . . ." She's stuck, but not at all flustered. She could just as well tell everything. This happened today: the atomic-energy smokestacks, the rubber-tree plant, the Pageant of the Lights, the smorgasbord, the girls' planned move to California. All things Christmassy. "Ummm, I just wanted to say that I'm . . . fine, and that I trust—make that hope—that I hope you are, too. I'll be back home—in Malibu, that is—after Christmas. I'd love—make that, enjoy—hearing from you. I'm at Snow Mountain Highlands. In Michigan." She pauses, discussing with herself if there'd be further news to relate. There isn't. Then she realizes (too late) she's treating this message machine like her Dictaphone. And there's no revising. Too bad. Her mistake. "Well, goodbye," she says, realizing this sounds a bit stiff, but doesn't revise. There's Block Island still. Though it's all over anyway. Who cares? She called.

ILLUMINATION

Ground lapis for the sky, and scrolls of gold,
Before which shepherds kneel, gazing aloft
At visiting angels clothed in egg-yolk gowns,
Celestial tinctures smuggled from the East,
From sunlit Eden, the palmed and plotted banks
Of sun-tanned Aden. Brought home in fragile grails,
Planted in England, rising at Eastertide,
Their petals cup stamens of topaz dust,
The powdery stuff of cooks and cosmeticians.
But to the camel's-hair tip of the finest brush
Of Brother Anselm it is the light of dawn,
Gilding the hems, the sleeves, the fluted pleats
Of the antiphonal archangelic choirs
Singing their melismatic *pax in terram.*
The child lies cribbed below, in bestial dark,
Pale as the tiny tips of crocuses
That will find their way to the light through drifts of snow.

—Anthony Hecht

OUT on the Nordic Trail, lights, soft yellow ones not unlike the Christmas-tree lights, have been strung to selected fir boughs—bright enough so you'd never get lost in the dark, dim enough not to spoil the spooky/romantic effect.

She does not really enjoy this kind of skiing either—height or no height—but wants to be a sport. Though there's the tiresome waxing, the stiff rented shoes, the long, inconvenient skis, the sweaty underneath, the chance that all this could eventuate in catching cold and missing work. The gym is better. Major heat, but then quick you're clean and back in the car. Back in the office. Back on the phone. She is a sport but not a sports nut. Still, this is not terrifying.

No one is with her on nighttime Nordic Trail 1, the Pageant of the Lights having lured away other skiers. Two Japanese men were at the trailhead. Small beige men in bright chartreuse Lycras—little serious faces, giant thighs, blunt no-nonsense arms—commencing the rigorous course, "the Beast," Nordic Trail 3. On their small, stocking-capped heads they'd worn lights like coal miners to shine their way. They have disappeared.

Here the snow virtually hums to the sound of her sliding strokes. A full moon rides behind filigree clouds as she strides forward in the near-darkness of crusted woods. There is wind she can hear high up in the tall pines and spruces, but at ground level there's no wind—just cold radiating off the metallic snow. Only her ears actually feel cold, they and the sweat line of her hair. Her heartbeat is hardly elevated. She is in shape.

For an instant then she hears distant music, a singing voice with orchestral accompaniment. She pauses in her tracks. The music's pulses travel through the trees. Strange. Possibly, she thinks between deep breaths, it's Roger—in the karaoke bar, Roger onstage, singing his greatest hits to other lonelies in the dark. "Blue Bayou," "Layla," "Tommy," "Try to Remember." Roger at a safe distance. Her pale hair, she realizes, is shining in the pure moonlight. If she were being watched, she would look good.

And wouldn't it be romantic, she thinks, to peer down through the dark woods and spy some great, ornate, and festive lodge lying below, windows ablaze, some exotic casino from a movie. Graceful skaters on a lighted rink. A garlanded lift still in motion, a few, last alpinists taking their silken, torchless float before lights-out. Only there's nothing to see—dark trunks and deadfalls, swags of snow hung in the spruce boughs.

And she is stiffening. Just this quickly. New muscles visited. No reason to go much farther.

Daisy, her sister, comes to mind. Daisy, who will very soon exit the hospital with a whole new view of life. Inside, there's of course a twelve-step ritual to accompany the normal curriculum of deprivation and regret. And someone, somewhere, at some time possibly long ago, *someone* will definitely turn out to have touched Daisy in some way detrimental to her well-being, and at an all too tender age. Once, but perhaps many times, over a series of terrible, silent years. Possibly an older, suspicious neighborhood youth—a loner—or a far too avuncular school librarian. Even the paterfamilias will come under posthumous scrutiny (the historical perspective as always unprovable, yet undisprovable, and therefore indisputable).

And certain sacrifices of dignity will then be requested of everyone, due to this rich new news from the past; a world so much more lethal than anyone believed; nothing the way we thought it was; if they had only known, could've spoken out, had opened up the lines of communication, could've trusted, confided, blah, blah, blah. Their mother will, necessarily, have suspected nothing, but unquestionably should've. Perhaps Daisy herself will have suggested that Faith is a lesbian. The snowball effect. No one safe, no one innocent.

Up ahead in the shadows, Ski Shelter 1 sits to the right of Nordic Trail 1—a darkened clump in a small clearing, a place to wait for the others to catch up (if there were others). And a perfect place to turn back.

Shelter 1 is open on one side like a lean-to, a murky school-bus enclosure hewn from logs. Out on the snow beside it lie crusts of dinner rolls, a wedge of pizza, some wadded tissue papers, three beer cans—treats for the forest creatures—each casting its tiny shadow upon the white surface.

Though seated in the gloomy inside on a plank bench are not schoolkids but Roger. The brother-in-law, in his powder-blue ski suit and hiking boots. He is not singing karaoke at all. She has noticed no boot tracks up the trail. Roger is more resourceful than first he seems.

"It's effing cold up here." Roger speaks from inside the shadows of Shelter 1. He is not wearing his black-frame glasses now, and is hardly visible, although she senses he is smiling—his narrow eyes even narrower.

"What are you doing up here, Roger?"

"Oh," Roger says from out of the gloom, "I just thought I'd come up." He crosses his arms, extends his hiking boots into the snow-light like a high-school toughie.

"What for?" Her knees feel knotty and weak from exertion. Her heart has begun thumping. Perspiration is cold on her lip, though. Temperatures are in the low twenties. In winter the most innocent places turn lethal. This is not good.

"Nothing ventured," Roger says.

"I was just about to turn around," Faith says.

"I see," Roger says.

"Would you like to go back down the hill with me?" What she wishes for is more light. Much more light. A bulb in the shelter would be very good. Bad things happen in the dark which would prove unthinkable in the light.

"Life leads you to some pretty interesting places, doesn't it, Faith?"

She would like to smile. Not feel menaced by Roger, who should be with his daughters.

"I guess," she says. She can smell alcohol in the dry air. He is drunk, and he is winging all of this. A bad mixture.

"You're very pretty. Very pretty. The big lawyer," Roger says. "Why don't you come in here."

"Oh, no thank you," Faith says. Roger is loathsome but he is also family. And she feels paralyzed by not knowing what to do. She wishes she could just leap upward, turn around, glide away.

"I always thought that in the right circumstances, we could have some big-time fun," Roger goes on.

"Roger, this isn't a good thing to be doing," whatever he's doing. She wants to glare at him, not smile, then realizes her knees are shaking. She feels very, very tall on her skis, unusually accessible.

"It *is* a good thing to be doing," Roger says. "It's what I came up here for. Some fun."

"I don't want us to do anything up here, Roger," Faith says. "Is that all right?" This, she realizes, is what fear feels like—the way you'd feel in a late-night parking structure, or jogging alone in an isolated area, or entering your house in the wee hours, fumbling for a key. Accessible. And then suddenly there would be someone. A man with oppressively ordinary looks who lacks a plan.

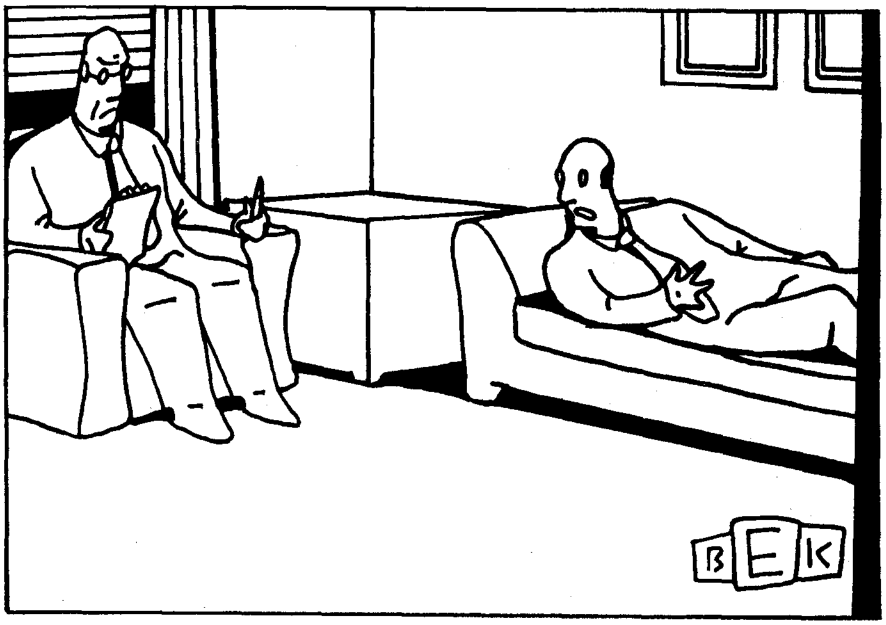
"Nope. Nope. That's not all right," Roger says. He stands up, but stays in the sheltered darkness. "The lawyer," Roger says again, still grinning.

"I'm just going to turn around," Faith says, and very unsteadily begins to shift her long left ski up out of its track, and then, leaning on her poles, her right ski up out of its track. It is unexpectedly dizzying, and her calves ache, and it is complicated not to cross her ski tips. But it is essential to remain standing. To fall would mean surrender. Roger would see it that way. What is the skiing expression? Tele... Tele-something. She wishes she could Tele-something. Tele-something the hell away from here. Her thighs burn. In California, she thinks, she is an officer of the court. A public official, sworn to uphold the law, though regrettably not to enforce it. She is a force for good.

"You look stupid," Roger says.

She intends to say nothing more. Talk is not cheap now. For a moment she thinks she hears music again, music far away. But it can't be.

"When you get all the way around," Roger says, "then I want to show you



"O.K., you told me so. May I continue?"

something." He does not say what. In her mind—moving her skis inches each time, her ankles stiff and heavy—in her mind she says "Then what?" but doesn't say that.

"I really hate your whole effing family," Roger says. His boots go crunch on the snow. She glances over her shoulder, but to look at him is too much. He is approaching. She will fall and then dramatic, regrettable things will happen. In a gesture he himself possibly deems dramatic, Roger—though she cannot see it—unzips his blue ski suit front. He intends her to hear this noise. She is three-quarters turned. She could see him over her left shoulder if she chose to. Have a look at what the excitement is about. She is sweating. Underneath she is drenched.

"Yep. Life leads you to some pretty interesting situations." There is another zipping noise. It is his best trick. Zip. This is big-time fun in Roger's world view.

"Yes," she says, "it does." She has come fully around now.

She hears Roger laugh, a little chuckle, an unhumorous "hunh." Then he says, "Almost." She hears his boots squeeze. She feels his actual self close beside her.

Then there are voices—saving voices—behind her. She now cannot help looking over her left shoulder and up the trail toward where it climbs into the darker trees. There is a light, followed by another light, little stars coming down from a height. Voices, words, language she does not quite understand. Japanese. She does not look at Roger, the girls' father, but simply slides one ski, her left one, forward into its track, lets her right one follow and find its way, pushes on her poles. And in just that amount of time and with that amount of effort she is away. She thinks she hears Roger say something, another "hunh," a kind of grunting sound, but can't be sure.

IN the condo everyone is sleeping. The rubber-tree lights are twinkling. They reflect in the window that faces the ski hill, which is now dark. Someone, Faith notices (her mother), has devoted much time to replacing the spent bulbs so the tree can twinkle. The gold star, the star that led the wise men, lies on the coffee table like a starfish, waiting to be properly affixed.

Marjorie, the younger, sweeter sister, is asleep on the orange couch under the Brueghel scene. She has left her bed to sleep near the tree, brought her quilted pink coverlet with her.

Naturally Faith has locked Roger out. Roger can now die alone and cold in the snow. Or he can sleep in a doorway or by a steam vent somewhere in the Snow Mountain Highlands complex and explain his situation to the security staff. Roger will not sleep with his pretty daughters this night. She is taking a hand in things. These girls are hers. Though how strange not to know that her offer to take them would be translated by Roger into an invitation to fuck. She has been in California too long, has fallen out of touch with things middle-American. How strange that Roger would say "effing." He would also probably say "X-mas."

"It's your friend who writes about wine."

Outside on the ice rink two teams are playing hockey under high white lights. A red team opposes a black team. Net cages have been brought on, the larger rink walled off to regulation size and shape. A few spectators stand watching. Wives and girlfriends. Boyne City versus Petoskey; Cadillac versus Cheboygan or some such. The little girls' white skates lie piled by the door she has now safely locked with a dead bolt.

It would be good to put the star up, she thinks. Who knows what tomorrow will bring. The arrival of wise men couldn't hurt. So, with the flimsy star, which is made of slick aluminum paper and is large and gold and weightless and five-pointed, Faith stands on the Danish dining-table chair and fits the slotted fastener onto the topmost leaf of the rubber-tree plant. It is not an elegant fit by any means, there being no sprig at the pinnacle, so that the star doesn't stand as much as it leans off the top in a sad, comic, but also victorious way. (This use was never envisioned by tree-makers in Seoul.) Tomorrow they can all add to the tree together, invent ornaments from absurd and inspirational raw materials. Tomorrow Roger will be rehabilitated and become everyone's best friend. Except hers.

Marjorie's eyes have opened, though she has not stirred. For a moment, on the couch, she appears dead.

"I went to sleep," she says softly and blinks her brown eyes.

"Oh, I saw you," Faith smiles. "I thought you were just another Christmas present. I thought Santa had been here early and left you for me." She takes a careful seat on the spindly coffee table, close beside Marjorie—in case there would be some worry to express, a gloomy dream to relate. A fear. She smooths her hand through Marjorie's warm hair.

Marjorie takes a deep breath and lets air go smoothly through her nostrils. "Jane's asleep," she says.

"And how would you like to go back to bed?" Faith says in a whisper.

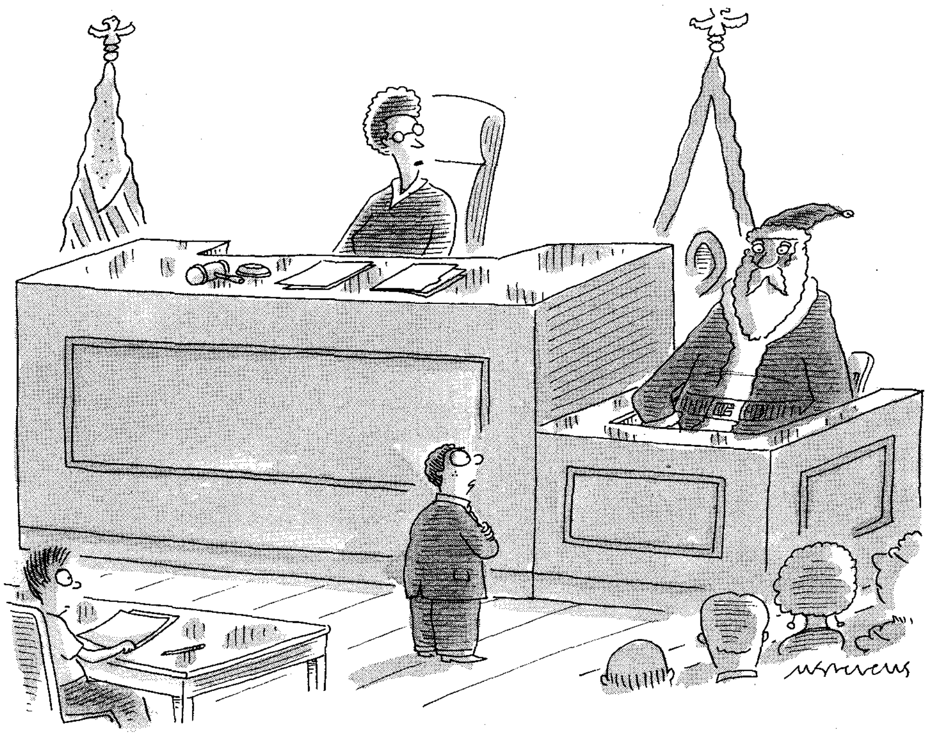
Possibly she hears a soft tap on the door. The door she will not open. The door beyond which the world and trouble wait. Marjorie's eyes wander toward the sound, then swim with sleep. She is safe.

"Leave the tree on," Marjorie instructs, though asleep.

"Sure, sure," Faith says. "The tree stays on forever."

She eases her hand under Marjorie, who by old habit reaches outward, caresses her neck. In an instant she has Marjorie in her arms, pink covers and all, carrying her altogether lightly to the darkened bedroom where her sister sleeps on one of the twin beds. Gently she lowers Marjorie onto the empty bed and re-covers her. Again she hears soft tapping, although it stops. She believes it will not come again this night.

Jane is sleeping with her face to the wall, her breathing deep and audible. Jane is the good sleeper, Marjorie the less reliable one. Faith stands in the middle of the dark, windowless room, between the twin beds, the blinking Christmas lights haunting the stillness that has come at such expense. The room smells musty and dank, as if it has been closed for months and opened just for this night, these children. If only briefly she is reminded of Christmases she might've once called her own. "O.K.," she whispers. "O.K., O.K., O.K."



"I see. And precisely what methods did you use to determine that my client was a 'bad boy'?"

• •

SHE undresses in the master suite, too tired to shower. Her mother sleeps on one side of their shared bed. She is an unexpectedly distinguishable presence there, visibly breathing beneath the covers. A glass of red wine half-drunk sits on the bed table beside her curved neck brace. The very same Brueghel print as in the living room hangs over their bed. She will wear pajamas, for her mother's sake. New ones. White, pure silk, smooth as water. Blue silk piping.

She half closes the bedroom door, the blinking Christmas lights shielded. And here is the unexpected sight of herself in the cheap, dark door mirror. All still good. Intact. Just the small scar where a cyst has been removed between two ribs. A meaningless scar no one would see. Thin, hard thighs. A small nice belly. Boy's hips. Two good breasts. The whole package, nothing to complain about.

Then the need of a glass of water. Always a glass of water at night, never a glass of red wine. When she passes the living-room window, her destination the kitchen, she sees that the hockey game is now over. It is after midnight. The players are shaking hands in a line on the ice, others skating in wide circles. On the ski slope above the rink, lights have been turned on again. Machines with headlights groom the snow at treacherous angles.

And she sees Roger. He is halfway between the ice rink and the condos, walking back in his powder-blue suit. He has watched the game, no doubt. He stops and looks up at her where she stands in the window in her white p.j.s, the Christmas lights blinking as a background. He stands and stares up. He has found his black-frame glasses. Possibly his mouth is moving, but he makes no gesture to her. There is no room in this inn for Roger.

In bed her mother seems larger. An impressive heat source, slightly damp when Faith touches her back. Her mother is wearing blue gingham, a nightdress not so different from the muumuu she wears in daylight. She smells unexpectedly good. Rich.

How long, she wonders, since she has slept with her mother? A hundred years? Twenty? Odd that it would be so normal now. And good.

She has left the door open in case the girls should call, in case they wake and are afraid, in case they miss their father. She can hear snow slide off the roof, an automobile with chains jingling softly somewhere out of sight. The Christmas lights blink merrily. She had intended to check her messages but let it slip.

Marriage. Yes, naturally she would think of that now. Maybe marriage, though, is only a long plain of self-revelation at the end of which there's someone else who doesn't know you very well. That is the message she could've left for Jack. "Dear Jack, I now know marriage is a long plain at the end of which there's" etc., etc., etc. You always think of these things too late. Somewhere, Faith hears faint music, "Away in a Manger," played prettily on chimes. It is music to sleep to.

And how would they deal with tomorrow? Not the eternal tomorrow, but the promised, practical one. Her thighs feel stiff, though she is slowly relaxing. Her mother, beside her, is facing away. How, indeed? Roger will be rehabilitated, tomorrow, yes, yes. There will be board games. Songs. Changes of outfits. Phone calls placed. Possibly she will find the time to ask her mother if anyone had ever been abused, and find out, happily, not. Looks will be passed between and among everyone tomorrow. Certain names, words will be in short supply for the sake of all. The girls will learn to ski and enjoy it. Jokes will be told. They will feel better. A family again. Christmas, as always, takes care of its own. ♦

ANNALS OF HISTORY

THE MANY STORIES OF BILLY THE KID

Was the legendary Western outlaw actually an Irish terrorist?

BY FINTAN O'TOOLE

1

On the last page of Michael Ondaatje's first novel, "The Collected Works of Billy the Kid," published in 1970, there is a photograph of a boy in a cowboy suit. The picture is small and blurry, but the suit shines through. It is fancy and filigreed, more Tyrone Power than John Wayne. White trim falls across the boy's upper thighs, and his pants are brightly illustrated with a man on horseback. Two mounted hombres ride across the front of an ornate waistcoat. The boy has a swaggering air, and an aura of invincibility—just like the Billy the Kid in the old tintype photograph. The boy is holding a gun in each hand. He looks so familiar that it is easy to ignore the oddities of the picture. For even in this cramped, poor reproduction, you can see that he is standing not in some dry Western desert but in a lush, wet landscape. You can see, too, that his face is dark-skinned. It is, in fact, Michael Ondaatje's own face, and the picture was taken in Sri Lanka, where the Canadian novelist grew up. "I put the photograph in just as a private mark of how the mythology of Billy the Kid had filtered down even to Sri Lanka," Ondaatje recalls. "The outfit is all wrong for that landscape. It shouldn't be there."

The book is a series of images, poems, newspaper reports, passages from a dime novel, invented recollections, and contemporary interviews, which overlap in such a way that the reader has difficulty telling what is fact and what is fiction. Ondaatje's version of the young killer from the Wild West is infinitely open to interpretation, or constitutes, as he puts it, "a mirror in which to represent a time or a place or a feeling, or some part of yourself that you want to explore." He remembers that when the book was first published "someone in Texas demanded to know why a Canadian was allowed to edit the works of one of the American Southwest's most famous sons." But just how American was Billy the Kid?

2

The official version of the story was told by Pat Garrett, the man who, on a hot night in July, 1881, shot the Kid in the dark. Garrett, the sheriff of Lincoln County, New Mexico, had arrested him seven months earlier on a murder charge and delivered him for trial. But the Kid, having been sentenced to hang, escaped from custody, and Garrett set out to find him. Garrett mounted a posse and traced the Kid to Fort Sumner, an abandoned Army camp where, a decade before, soldiers had systematically subjugated and slaughtered the Navajos and the Mescalero Apaches. This time, Garrett carried out the sentence himself—and earned a five-hundred-dollar bounty.

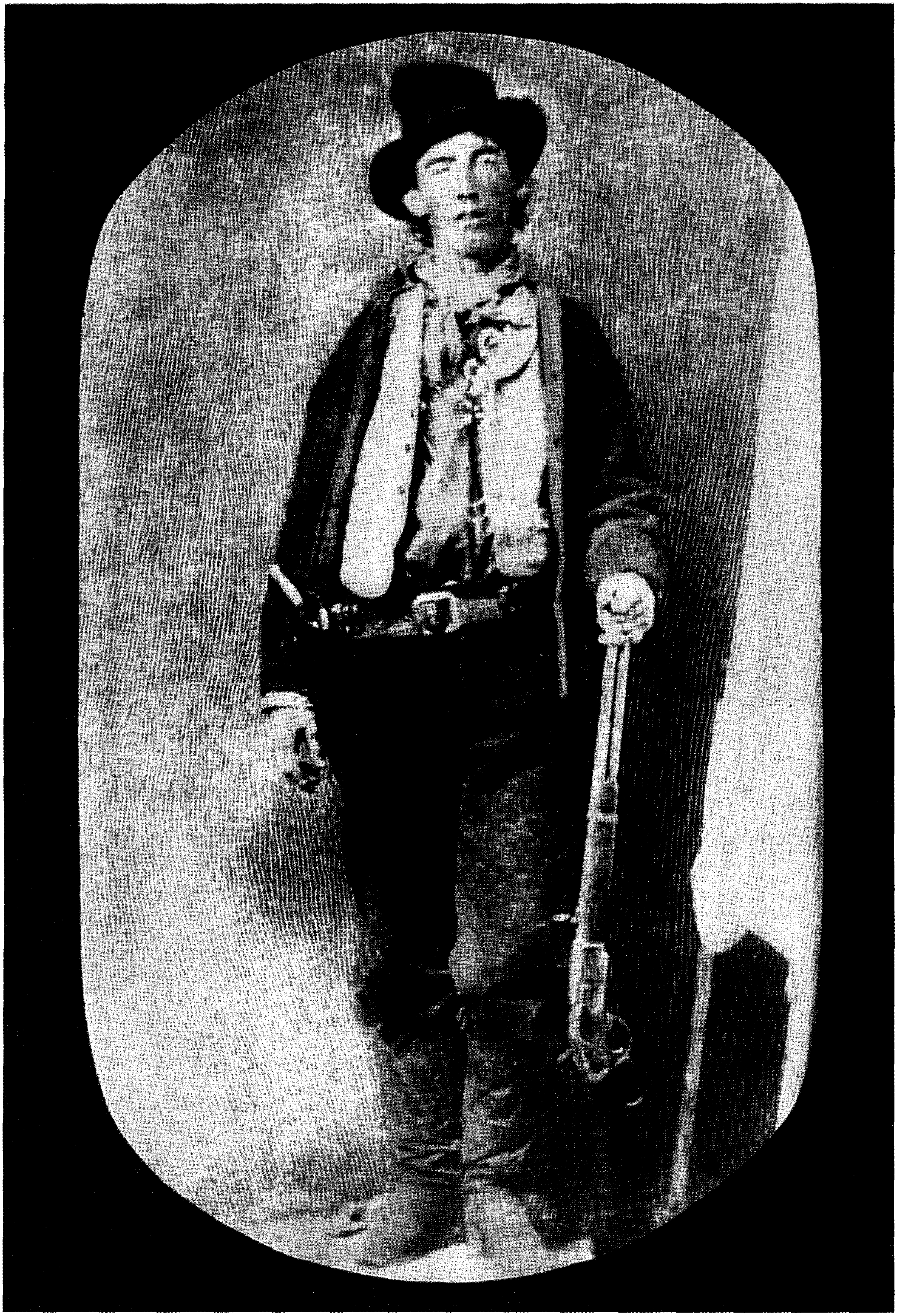
Then, just nine months after he'd killed him, Garrett brought the Kid back to life with a ghostwritten memorial, "The Authentic Life of Billy the Kid, The Noted Desperado of the Southwest, Whose Deeds of Daring and Blood Have Made His Name a Terror in New Mexico, Arizona & Northern Mexico." Within months of his death, Garrett explains, this obscure twenty-one-year-old gunman from a remote corner of America had become a prodigious breeder of fictions. There were already a thousand false stories in the newspapers and in "yellow-covered cheap novels." In the last year of his life, almost every unsolved crime in New Mexico had been attributed to him. Now Garrett would tell the truth. The lawman would do the outlaw justice.

Garrett wants to set straight the story of the Kid's tragic early life. Billy, he explains, was really William H. Bonney, born in New York but raised in New Mexico by a cruel and tyrannical stepfather and a mother he worshipped. In fact, the Kid's first murder was committed defending his mother's honor, according to Garrett, in Silver City, a wild New Mexico mining town. A man on a street corner made an insulting remark as the Kid and his mother walked past, and the Kid smashed the man in the face; later, when he saw the same man in a fight in a saloon, the Kid rushed in, stabbed him three times with a pocket knife, and then ran out into the night—wandering in the desert for three days, before stealing a horse and heading for Arizona. He was twelve years old.

Garrett also wants his readers to understand the social context of the Kid's crimes: the Kid was a civilized white man surrounded by dark savages. Killing an Indian was, for Billy, a different order of crime from killing a white man. Garrett cites the time when Billy and a companion—a man so mysterious he was known only as Alias—came upon three Apaches with a string of ponies loaded with pelts, saddles, and blankets. The Kid asked politely for two of the ponies, promising to pay later, but the Apaches refused. "Here were three bloodthirsty savages," Billy is quoted as saying, "revelling in all this luxury and refusing succor to two free-born, white American citizens, footsore and hungry." Naturally, he shot them: "In three minutes there were three 'good Injuns' lying around there, careless like."

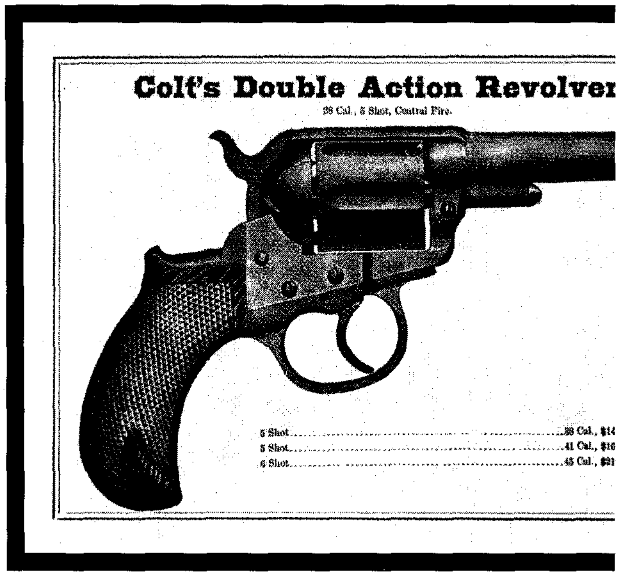
There were other killings, similarly justified—of Mexicans, more Indians. In Sonora, Mexico, the Kid, having won handsomely at a game of monte, suffered the jeering abuse of a dealer named Don José Martinez, who, with his gun conspicuously displayed on the table, launched into a foul tirade against grin-

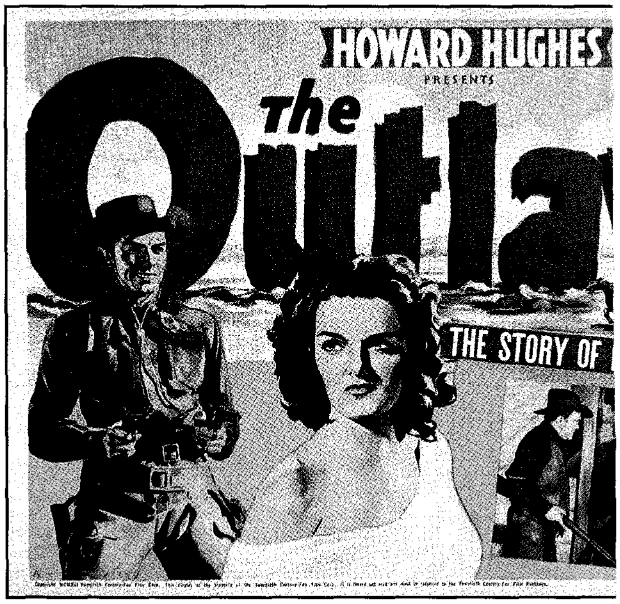
Right: the only undisputed photograph of Billy the Kid. How did Irish Catholics and British Protestants killing each other in the Wild West become an American story?



PETER NEWARK'S WESTERN AMERICANA

WANTED FOR MURDER
WILLIAM BONNEY
ALIAS
"BILLY THE KID"





Clockwise from above: Robert Taylor; Colt, the cowboy's weapon; Paul Newman and Lita Milan in "The Left-Handed Gun"; Daniel Levans in the ballet "Billy the Kid"; and Jack Beutel and Jane Russell.

gos in general and the Kid in particular. The Kid left the gambling hall but returned that evening, only for Martinez to resume his abuse, his hand now on his gun. The Kid addressed the Mexican, as Garrett tells it, in a cool, steady tone: "José, do you fight as bravely with that pistol as you do with your mouth?" The Mexican raised his gun, but Billy fired first, and his bullet passed through Martinez's eye, knocking him back in his seat and killing him. Later, in New Mexico, the Kid rescued a family of pioneers from a party of Apache warriors, grabbing his Winchester and fighting off half a dozen of them before running out of ammunition; he then darted under a wagon for protection, found a prairie axe, and threw himself back into the red men, hacking away. In minutes, eight Indians were dead. The Kid tipped his hat and rode off toward the Rio Grande.

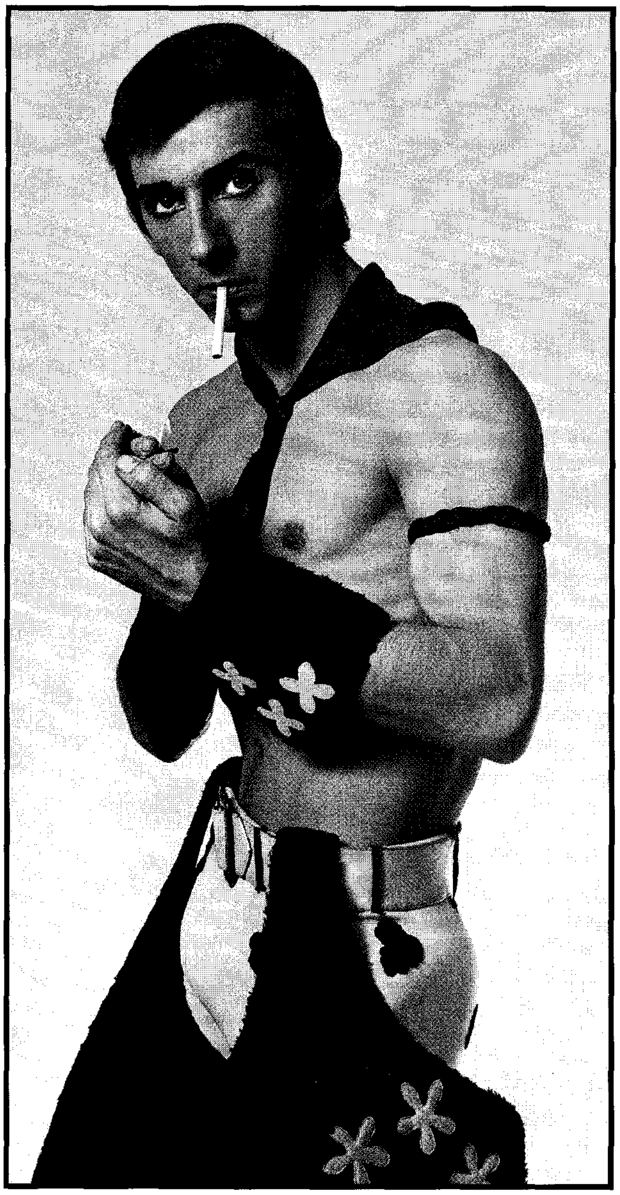
Finally, Garrett wants his readers to know the importance of John Tunstall, the owner of a general store in Lincoln and a ranch nearby. Educated, civilized, respectable, Tunstall, an Englishman, met the Kid not long after he arrived in New Mexico, in 1877, and the young men became friends. The Kid appears to have been ready to settle down, to have lost his taste for blood, and agreed to work as a cowboy on Tunstall's ranch. But then, a few months later, Tunstall, who had been involved in a business dispute, was murdered in the mountains above the town—executed by a member of a posse who placed a rifle against the back of the Englishman's head and fired. Before nightfall, the Kid was told of his friend's murder and swore to punish the killers. The Kid became an avenging angel.

"Breathing vengeance," Garrett writes, the Kid "quitted his herd, mounted his horse, and from that day to the hour of his death, his track was blazed with rapine and blood." His life and death were now set in stone. He would hunt down Tunstall's killers and live as an outlaw until Garrett performed a sheriff's duty and, with a heavy heart, mercifully terminated the Kid's life.

Garrett's account has so many elements of a great romance: the precocious youth with a good heart, the wanderer

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: PHOTOFEST; PETER NEWARK'S
WESTERN AMERICANA; KOBAL COLLECTION; JACK MITCHELL; MPTV

Three months after the Kid's death, a Montana newspaper reported that his body had been dug up, his head removed, and the skull polished in a manner appropriate to a relic.



in the desert who punishes insolent savages, the noble outlaw, and, above all, the upholder of a code of honor who will not abide an insulted woman or a murdered friend. And the entire story is told by a man who was there. It has, of course, immense authority.

3

ON the cover of the booklet accompanying the soprano Barbara Bonney's most recent CD, she holds a photograph of a man who may or may not be Billy the Kid. The CD is called "Sallie Chisum Remembers Billy the Kid," and it features a piece of that name composed for Bonney by André Previn. As a child, she was told that Billy the Kid's real name was William Bonney and that she was one of his descendants. "It was the family myth," she says. "I was told that Billy Bonney was Billy the Kid and he came from the same area where my father grew up." The man in the photograph *is* the Kid, Bonney insists, and "looks so much like my father that it's terrifying." The piercing eyes, the sticking-out ears, she says, are so familiar that she is sometimes convinced that the family story is not myth but fact. "I suppose I don't really care whether it's true or not. I just like that it's my family saga, that it gives me something personal to connect to." She has her own private image of Billy—"a lonely man, misguided, but very dapper, quite vain, a dandy."

There are many images of Billy the Kid. Early novels and newspaper reports conjured an image of an outlaw who was so nasty, so vicious, so cruel that he could not possibly have been a white man. The suggestion was that he had somehow reverted to something more primitive—more wild. In late 1878, when the Kid was still alive, the New York *Times* described the territory as being controlled by a "handful of uneasy, wandering and lawless people . . . mostly Mexicans and other mixed races." In 1901, in the hands of the best-selling dime novelist Emerson Hough, Pat Garrett was Anglo-Saxon civilization and Billy the Kid was the wildness of the inferior races. Garrett "stood for the new order of things," and, naturally, his "Anglo-Saxon civilization was destined to overrun" the Kid's "half-Spanish civilization."

Billy has been played on screen by, among others, Audie Murphy, Roy Rogers, Robert Taylor, Paul Newman, Kris Kristofferson, and Val Kilmer. In 1930, King Vidor's film "Billy the Kid" made Billy, played by the former college football star Johnny Mack Brown, into an agent of American progress, defeating evil, allowing good to triumph. "Every killing you've done," the respectable girl who has fallen for the Kid assures him, "has been needed. You've made this town a decent place to live in." By 1949, and the movie "Son of Billy the Kid," Billy is a middle-aged banker coming to the aid of his wrongly accused son by helping the authorities catch the real criminals. The transformation to Wasp hero is complete.

As Paul Newman played him, in 1958, in Arthur Penn's "The Left-Handed Gun," Billy is a saint who dies on a cross of wagon shafts. When Jean-Pierre Léaud played him, in Luc Moullet's "*Une Aventure de Billy le Kid*," in 1971, he became, for a while, a French existentialist. He has oral sex with Jean Harlow in heaven in Michael McClure's 1965 play "The Beard." He battles a vampire in the 1966 movie "Billy the Kid vs. Dracula." In Samuel R. Delany's 1968 novel "The Einstein Intersection," Billy has red hair, golden lashes, transparent skin, and eyes that have "no whites, only glittering gold and brown . . . dog's eyes in a human face." He has been compared to Odysseus, El Cid, Achilles, Moses, Siegfried, and Robin Hood.

He inspired a television play by Gore Vidal, a ballet by Eugene Loring and Aaron Copland, a film by Marlon Brando. He crosses paths with Mickey Mouse in a Disney cartoon. He is the hero of a computer game. He figures in songs by Woody Guthrie, Billy Joel, Ry Cooder, and Bob Dylan. Dylan also plays his legendary sidekick, Alias, in Sam Peckinpah's film "Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid."

4

WHAT was Billy the Kid really like? José García y Trujillo claimed that he had been a member of the posse that tracked the Kid down, and in August of 1936 he was visited by a young woman named Janet Smith, who was collecting New Mexico folklore for a New Deal oral-history project. Smith had almost no Spanish, and José García y Trujillo had little English, so at times he had to communicate through florid, emphatic gestures. He pointed to his forehead. "That Billy, *tenía un' agileza en su mente—en su mente aquí*." Inside his mind, he wanted her to understand, the Kid had speed and nimbleness. He put his finger to his head again and then flung it toward the sky, mimicking a bolt from the blue. "*Una función eléctrica*," he stressed. Smith caught his drift. In the report she later sent to the folklore archives, she describes Billy the Kid's mind as having "something that worked like lightning."

José García y Trujillo told her how, fifty-five years before, when he was not much more than a kid himself, he was herding sheep on a ranch nearly a hundred miles southeast of Albuquerque when some men rode up. One of them, the sheriff, was "*muy, muy alto*"—very, very tall—a detail that was important to Smith because she knew that Pat Garrett had stood six feet four and a half inches. The lanky lawman offered José García y Trujillo five dollars a day and food for himself and his horse if he would join the posse.

Did he know who this Billy was?

"I see Billy the Kid with these eyes. Many times, with these eyes."

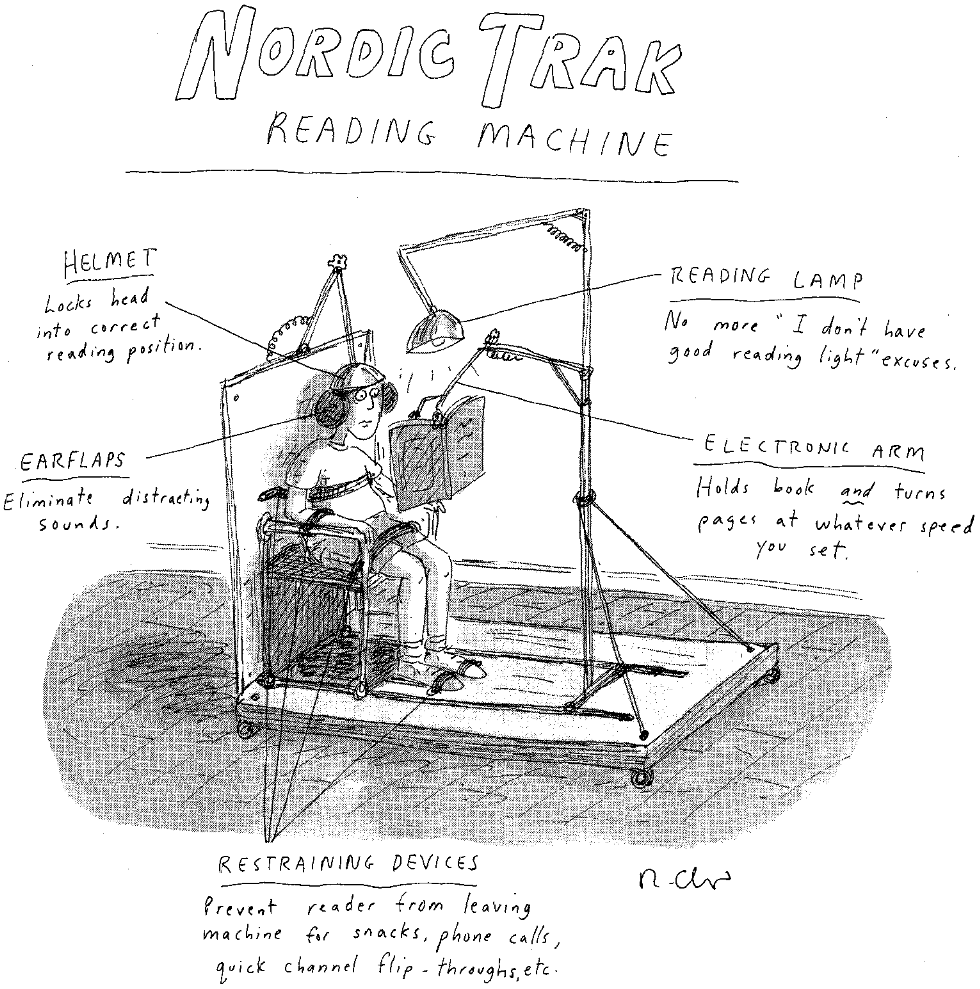
What did he look like?

"*Chopito*—a short man but wide in shoulders and strong. His forehead was big. His eyes were blue. He wore Indian shoes with beads on his feet."

How did he behave?

"*Muy generoso hombre*, Billy the Kid." A very generous man. "All the Mexican people, they like him." And Billy lived among the Mexicans and spoke fluent Spanish. (In fact, Mexicans identified his body after he was shot, washed it, encircled it with candles, and prayed for him.)

"He give money, horses, drinks—what he have. To whom was good to Billy the Kid, he was good to them. *Siempre muy caballero, muy señor*." Always polite, very much the gentleman. "Everybody like Billy the Kid—*su vista penetraba*


NORDIC TRAK
READING MACHINE
HELMET
Locks head into correct reading position.
READING LAMP
No more "I don't have good reading light" excuses.
EARFLAPS
Eliminate distracting sounds.
ELECTRONIC ARM
Holds book and turns pages at whatever speed you set.
RESTRAINING DEVICES
Prevent reader from leaving machine for snacks, phone calls, quick channel flip-throughs, etc.

el corazón de toda la gente." His look pierced the heart of all the people.

So why did José García y Trujillo agree to join Pat Garrett's posse?

Five dollars a day was a lot of money, he explained, and, anyway, he knew that Billy was sure to escape. "They pay us, we go—sure. But we don't want to shoot Billy. We always glad he too smart for us." So he rode with the posse over to Fort Sumner, where Garrett suspected Billy was hiding.

Janet Smith knew what happened next. She had read Garrett's "Authentic Life of Billy the Kid." Garrett, tipped off that someone at the fort might know where the Kid was hiding, rode out there on a hot, clear night in July, 1881. A man named Pete Maxwell, known to be a friend of the Kid, lived near the old parade grounds, and Garrett went to his house, taking two men with him. It was nearly midnight. Garrett could make out Maxwell's place, a long, low adobe building, shadowed on three sides by a porch. The door and the windows had been left open, in the hope of stirring the stifling air. Garrett slipped into a room and found a man in bed—Maxwell. He sat down at the head of the bed and asked Maxwell if Billy the Kid was at Fort Sumner. Maxwell said he didn't know. But in fact Billy was just outside. He had taken off his boots, hat, and vest, and, in his stocking feet, was making his way around to the north porch, with a gun and a butcher knife in his hand; a freshly killed yearling calf was hanging from the rafters. The Kid spotted one of Garrett's companions, also outside waiting, and backed away into Maxwell's bedroom, hissing, "*Quién es*? *Quién es*?" "Who's there? Who's there?" He asked Maxwell who the men outside were and then became aware that there was someone else in the room. He called out again, "*Quién es*? *Quién es*?"

"He must have then recognized me," Garrett told an interviewer a few days later, "for he went backward with a catlike movement, and I jerked my gun and fired." The flash of the explosion blinded Garrett, and he fired again. About to fire a third time, he heard a groan and a death rattle.

Janet Smith showed José García y Trujillo the Garrett book and told him what it said. But the old man shook his forefinger. The truth, he said, was that they had surrounded Pete Maxwell's house for two weeks but never so much as caught sight of Billy. "No, Señora," he said. "You think Billy the Kid let himself be shot in the dark like that? No, Señora—Billy the Kid—never." She pointed to a photograph of Pat Garrett in the book and insisted that he was the man who had killed Billy the Kid. "I don't want to dispute against you Señora, but in my mind, which is the picture of my soul, I know it is not true."

In his soul, José García y Trujillo knew that Billy the Kid had got away, that he was still alive on the eve of the Second World War. Pat Garrett's "Authentic Life" was just another work of fiction.

5

I AM walking up the only street of Lincoln, New Mexico, panting in the thin mountain air and squinting in the stunning light reflected off the stark, jagged hills. I know the landscape from a thousand Westerns. Arid brown dust and prickly pear slowly giving way to scrub oak, juniper, and piñon. A narrow, fertile river valley in a vast canvas of desert, the fragile presence of human settlement against a pitiless sun and the harsh folds of rock and sand. The street is smooth and tarred, and prim signs point out the important buildings. But the buildings themselves are preserved almost exactly as they were in 1878, when, by one estimate, as many as a hundred men were killed that summer.

I am here because I share one thing with Billy the Kid: we are both Irishmen. Before he was the Kid, before he was William Bonney, even before he was Kid Antrim or Henry Antrim or any of the other names he used, he was Henry McCarty. Pat Garrett got his name wrong. But Garrett got many things wrong. Billy the Kid did not kill a man in Silver City when he was twelve. Garrett's stories of Apaches and Navajos and Mexicans are wildly implausible, and there is no evidence that they are true. And, as it happens, they are not even Garrett's own yarns. Though he put his name to them, they were actually introduced by his ghostwriter, a former newspaperman named Ash Upson.

The person we now call Billy the Kid was born, possibly in County Limerick, but more probably in the Irish slums of New York, the son of Catherine McCarty. Her husband, if she had one, was called either Patrick or Michael. In all likelihood, they were among the million or so Irish Catholics who fled the great Irish famine of the eighteen-forties. The Kid's father seems to have died in New York while the Kid was still very young. Catherine, with Henry and his brother, Joseph, in tow, moved west, to Indiana, then to Kansas, and finally to Silver City, New Mexico.

And the story of what happened in Lincoln is Irish, too. The violence that surrounds Billy the Kid is traditionally seen in relation to the place where it occurred—the Wild West. The violence is rarely seen in the context of the society which tolerated it, encouraged it, provoked it. And that society—misshapen, transplanted, full of prejudice and sectarian stupidity—is one I know well. To my eyes, the violence is of the same order of the violence that has ravaged Northern Ireland for the last thirty years—the Troubles that I grew up with. I see the Lincoln of the eighteen-eighties as characterized by a vicious sectarian battle fought between Irish Catholics and British Protestants. What began as a struggle for economic power was exacerbated by national and religious hatred until it became a war of ethnic obliteration. It stopped only when both sides were destroyed.

Savage Apaches and arrogant Mexican gamblers had nothing to do with the trouble here. The triumph of the Anglo-Saxons over the dark races was beside the point. As a missionary in Lincoln at the start of the violence wrote to his mother, "Indians & Mexicans are not troublesome—it is the whites. One party trying to elbow the other out of the country." Catholic Irish whites and Protestant British whites killing each other in the Wild West is not an American story. For Americans, what happened here was inexplicable—a tangle of strange hatreds, a fierce mystery to which the only available key was Billy the Kid. For an Irishman like me, though, it is brutally familiar.

6

THE Irish Catholics in Lincoln were led by the stately Major Lawrence Murphy. Murphy was born around 1834 in County Wexford and left Ireland in the famine years. He joined the United States Army in Buffalo in 1851, and his career was largely organized around the slaughter of Indians. In 1862, he assisted Kit Carson in a mission to eliminate, in the words of their official orders, "all Indian men of the Mescalero tribe . . . whenever and wherever you find them." The following year, Murphy was involved in a campaign against the Navajos. For his part in the massacre of some three hundred of them, he was commended by Carson as "a most efficient and energetic officer." At the time he left the Army, in 1866, he was commander of Fort Stanton, the base from which the Army had insured that the defeated Mescaleros remained on their reservation, leaving the rest of southeastern New Mexico to men like himself.

Murphy ran Lincoln. Because of his Army connections, he had a grip on the only major commercial enterprise for hundreds of miles around—supplying beef and other goods to Fort Stanton and to the Mescalero reservation. He drank heavily, and his drinking made him, by turns, genial and expansive or violent and tyrannical. There were rumors that his interest in certain local men was more than the friendly attentions of a gracious Catholic gentleman, but since Murphy himself was the law in Lincoln no one was likely to repeat the rumors to his face.

Murphy's protégé and partner was Jimmy Dolan. Dolan most likely was born in the small town of Loughrea, in County Galway, in 1848, at the height of the famine; he emigrated to America and grew up in New York, educated by the Irish Christian Brothers. He joined the Army, took part in the conquest of the Indians, and met Murphy. He had a quick brain and ran most of the business. He also had a quick temper, carried a gun, and liked to use it. Another Murphy cohort was John Riley, probably born on Valencia Island, off the southwest coast of Ireland, in 1850. He and his family seem to have emigrated to America when he was about twelve. And then there was William Brady, the sheriff of Lincoln County, who was another old Army crony of Murphy's. He was seen as Murphy's enforcer, and, when the killing began, he got the blame and paid the price.

7

I HAVE reached the western end of the only street in Lincoln, and I stand in front of a two-story adobe house that is the tallest building in town. It is long and deep, with tall chimneys rising from a pitched slate roof and rows of elegant windows running along the front. When Billy the Kid was alive, it was known simply as the House, and it was the capital of an Irish empire.

The Irish in Lincoln were violent men. They had made their way in this New World by slaughtering the people of the Southwest. And now they had their reward: the House. The House was a general store, but it was also much more. It was a bank and a commodities-trading depot. It controlled the only important business in the county. The local farmers had to buy virtually everything they needed from the House, and they had to sell whatever they produced to the House. And the House rules were the law. Murphy himself had been a judge, with authority over trade with the Indians and over the county treasury. By the late eighteen-seventies, the Irish faction—with strong connections to the powerful Santa Fe Ring, a political machine that ran the rest of New Mexico—had turned itself into a Tammany Hall with Stetsons and six-shooters. This was the domain of the Irish, their refuge at last from famine and poverty.

And then there were the British cowboys. They were not the roughriders of the Westerns but hardworking Protestant businessmen with ambition. John Tunstall was in his early twenties, full of Victorian striving and naïveté, when he arrived in Lincoln County, in late 1876. He surveyed the scene, spotted the opportunities, but failed to understand the power of the House. In May, 1877, he wrote home to his father, a wealthy London merchant, "Capitalists make money by controlling markets; I have found a market that *we* can control, if we will." He had figured out a scheme that "would catch the ready money of the Indian department & the Army & avoid the danger of too many debtors among a needy and improvident class." He established a ranch, a store, and a trading operation that he hoped would allow him to "get the half of every dollar that is made in the county *by anyone*"—a scheme that won him the immediate enmity of Murphy and his faction.

Tunstall found like-minded men, including John Chisum, a Protestant rancher of English descent known as the "cattle king." (His associate Montague Leverson, a wealthy English rancher, wrote to President Rutherford Hayes asking for his help in transforming the river valleys of New Mexico into "a colony to be chiefly composed of citizens from old and new England.") Tunstall's partner was Alexander McSween, a lawyer who, after Tunstall's murder, assumed the leadership of the Protestant faction in Lincoln and was murdered in his turn. He called himself a "Scotchman"—he was born possibly on the Isle of Skye but more probably in Canada of Scottish parents—and "a Presbyterian by birth, education, and choice." He shared Tunstall's sense of being urgently Protestant and insistently British.

Tunstall and his associates thought they had come to a place with no history. The belief in his circle was that it was the destiny of the Anglo-Saxon race to advance while the lesser, darker peoples retreated. This was wilderness. Tunstall was civilization. This was primitive. He was progress. The Irish may have got there before him, but they were of little account. Tunstall called Sheriff Brady "an Irishman, a slave of whiskey, and a man I think very little of."

For Protestants like Tunstall and McSween, the Catholics of New Mexico were a loutish and sinister lot. When Tunstall arrived in Santa Fe, on his way to Lincoln, he wrote home, "I was rather surprised to hear the other day that the priests take a toll of one seventh of every man's income, who is within the pale of the Roman Catholic Church, I could hardly credit it but the people stand it 'poor degraded superstitious devils' it is no great wonder they are poor." New Mexico, already full of Hispanic Catholics, now had its share of Irish settlers as well. Protestants saw the terrible prospect of the place becoming a Catholic state of the union. McSween wrote to the Presbyterian missionary effort for the West, asking it to send a Protestant preacher before the Catholics took over entirely.

By the time the Presbyterian mission had responded—sending Taylor Ealy—it was probably too late. Tunstall was finally sensing the Irish resentment of him. "I go by the name of 'The Englishman' as a general thing," he wrote to his parents, "& they say . . . 'Confound that Englishman, what is he going to do in this country anyhow?' " But it's possible that neither he nor McSween knew how much the Irish hated them until Tunstall was surrounded by the posse sent by the Murphy faction to kill him. Perhaps it was only when Tunstall's body, ravaged by frost and wild animals, was brought down to Lincoln after a night on the mountain that McSween realized the battle for the soul of New Mexico would be fought not with commerce or Sunday schools and Bibles but with bullets.

Taylor Ealy arrived the day after Tunstall was murdered. He and his family spent the night in McSween's house with the corpse. Ealy's first duty was to assist at the autopsy. As the Irish Catholics turned their attention to McSween, Ealy realized that he had arrived in the middle of a murderous religious war. On his second day, he was jeered by Murphy's followers and told that the town had no need of his Bible-punching. Shortly afterward, he was stopped by a member of the Murphy faction, Jack Long, who was, according to the disgusted preacher, "under the influence of liquor." Long said he would as soon see a whore come to Lincoln as Ealy. Ealy muttered something about being in a hurry and tried to pass. Long took his arm and said, "I helped hang a Methodist preacher in Arizona."

Ealy wrote home, "They are persecuting [McSween] partly because he is a Presbyterian. . . . They are a dirty set of Irish cut throats and you know what their religion is. They drink whiskey, gamble, and nothing is too bad for them." Ealy likened the Murphy-Dolan faction to the Spanish Inquisition. He compared McSween to one of the Covenanters who was martyred in defense of the Scottish Presbyterian Church in the seventeenth century.

After Tunstall's murder, these animosities hardened into ethnic war. McSween formed his own paramilitary gang, the Regulators. He hired as many mercenaries as he could find. They included, naturally, Tunstall's cowboys, among them Billy the Kid.

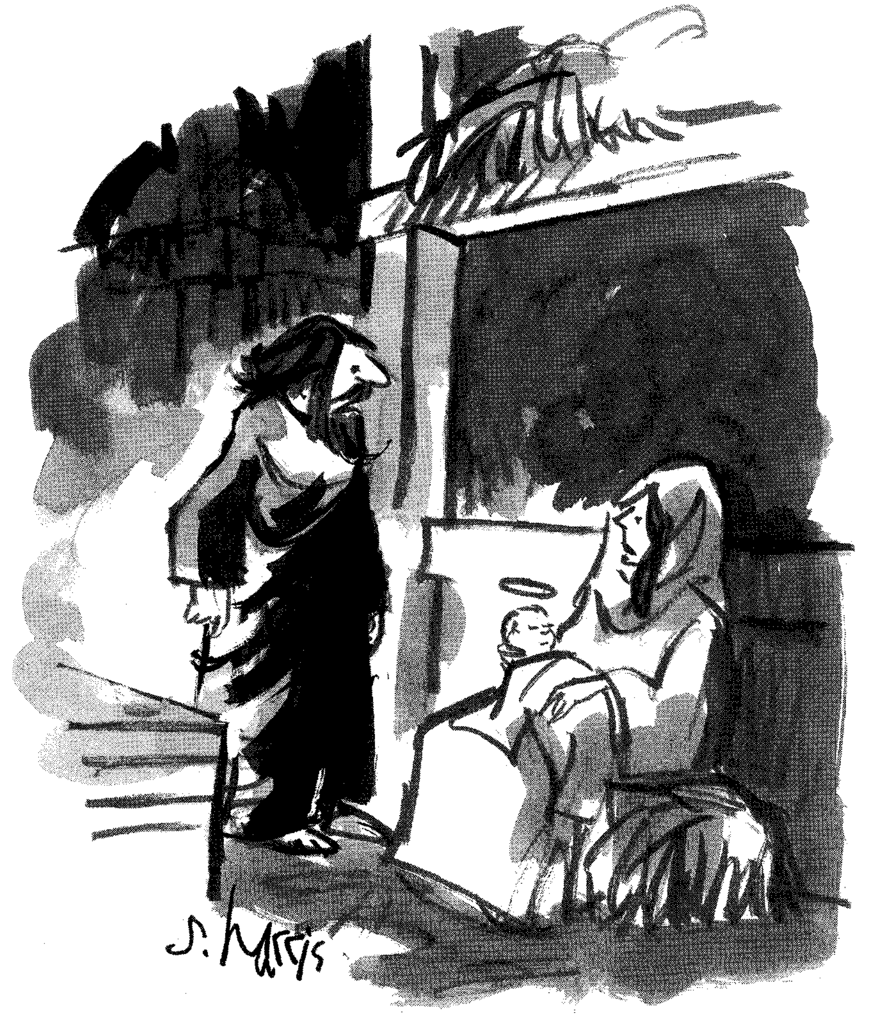
8

FRANK HUGHES was an I.R.A. man on the run in the badlands of Derry and Tyrone in the mid-nineteen-seventies. He was a kid in his late teens when he started killing his enemies and in his early twenties when he was finally caught, in 1978. The authorities had put his face on wanted posters and pasted them on telephone poles, and if they could have put a price on his head they would have.

Hughes was handsome and had the reckless gaiety of youth. He was courteous to women, followed a coherent code of honor, had a knack for miraculous escapes, and played the role of the justified villain, having been badly beaten up as a boy by Protestant police—a bad guy with a cause. He was devoted to his mother. He had a sweet, open face. He loved to dance. He was forever smiling and had a notoriously infectious laugh.

Stories gathered around him. Once, when the British Army was searching a safe house where he was hiding, he emerged wearing military fatigues, carrying his rifle, and announced, as if he were one of the soldiers themselves, "nothing inside." On another occasion, when he was stopped by an Army patrol, he asked for a light and chatted warmly with the soldiers. Surrounded by troops after he had murdered one policeman and wounded another, he simply vanished.

In the stories, Hughes ceased to be a



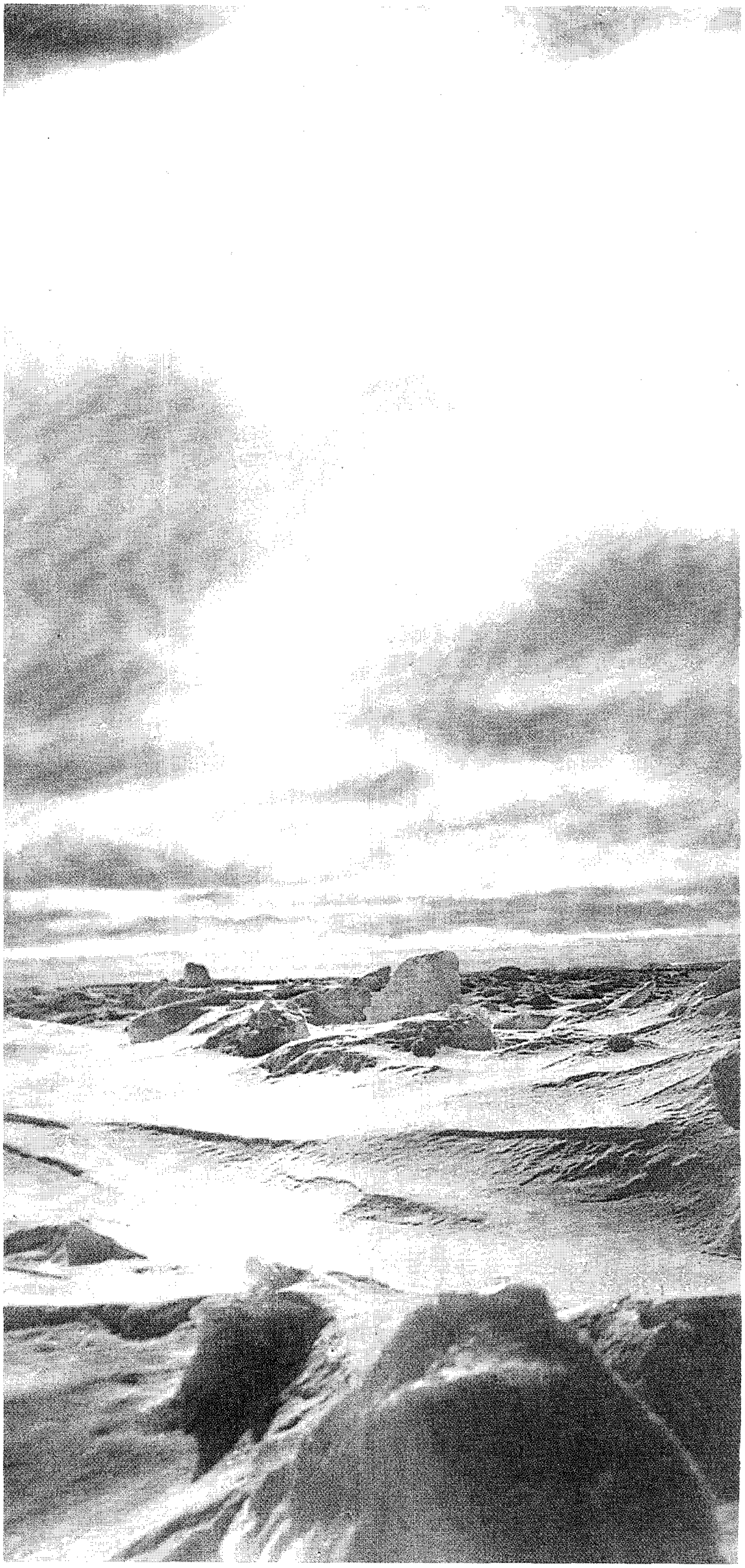
"Now we'll need a sitter for New Year's Eve."

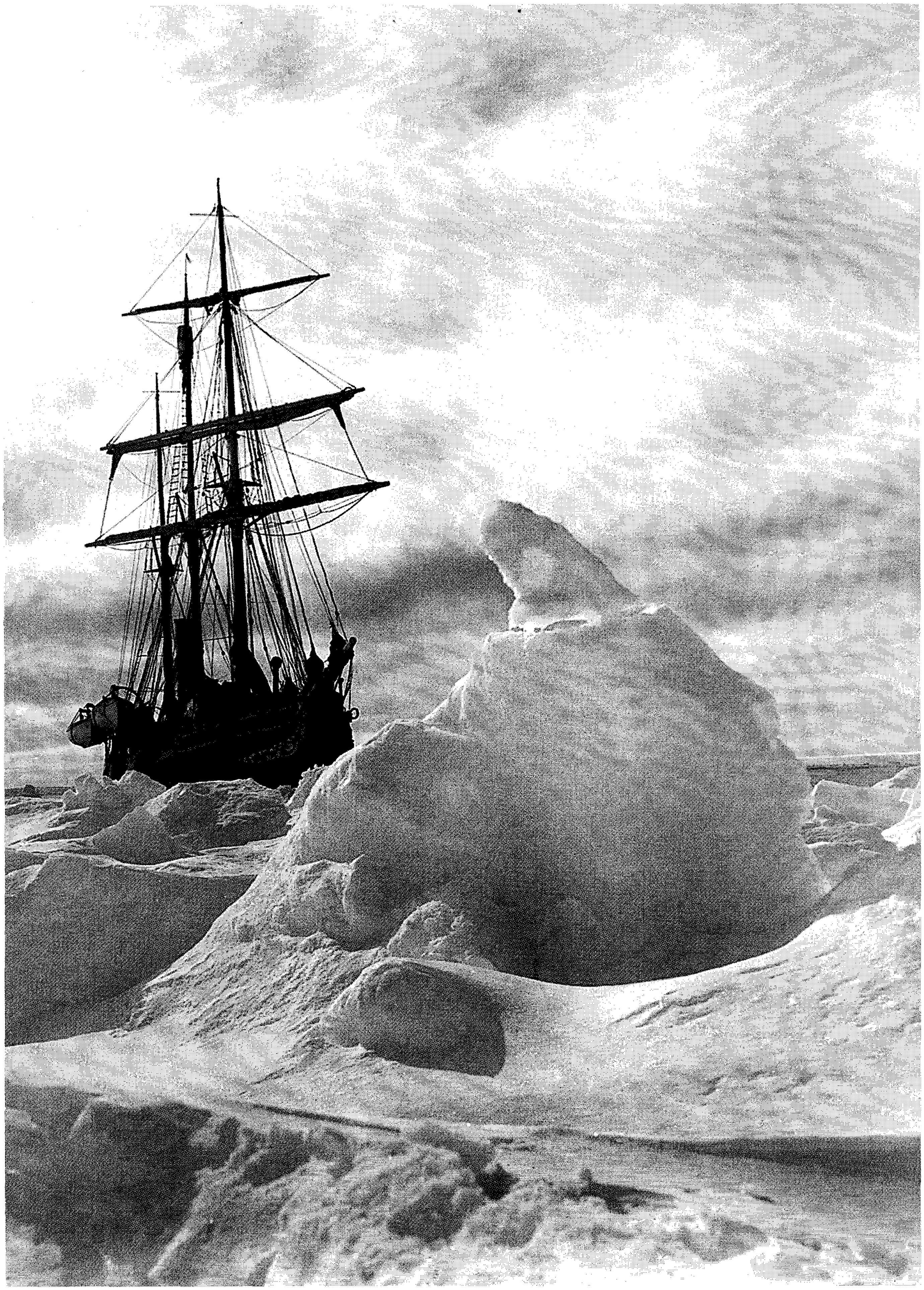
killer in a religious and ethnic war, and became a figure of pure, wild mischief. When the police tried to interrogate him, he grinned, and said, "I don't talk to strangers." Once, in his own village, after he planted bombs intended to blow up the Protestants' shops, he raced down the street, yelling slogans at the top of his voice, daring to be caught. He once hijacked a police car, forced the men inside to strip, and took their uniforms as trophies—just for a lark. He killed for the sheer hell of it—for the intense, pleasurable satisfaction of murder. "He was," one senior I.R.A. commander recalled after Hughes was dead, "the sort of man who would shoot up a few policemen on his way to a meeting to plan the next attack on the police."

Hughes was finally caught after he had been wounded in the leg in a shootout with the Army. As he was lying in his cell waiting to be interrogated, he wrote a letter to his sister. "There was a western on TV one night and to tell you the truth, I was scared stiff, because there was a lot of shooting in it," he wrote. "And I feared one of the cowboy bullets would come through the TV and hit me in the leg." It may have been a devious attempt to convince the authorities that he was insane, or it may have

74° SOUTH

On January 14, 1915, Frank Hurley took this photograph of the Endurance, laying to in the frozen Weddell Sea, eighty miles from Antarctica; five days later, she was captured in ice. Hurley was documenting an expedition led by Sir Ernest Shackleton, which included twenty-eight men, sixty-nine sledge dogs, two pigs, and the ship's cat, Mrs. Chippy. Together, they drifted in a world of ice for nine months, until the Endurance was finally crushed. The story of their unlikely journey home to civilization (which was then caught up in an uncivilized Great War) is elegantly told by Caroline Alexander in "The Endurance" (Knopf), which also includes Hurley's photographs. In April, an exhibition at the American Museum of Natural History, curated by Alexander, will commemorate the twenty-month ordeal, which Shackleton summed up with characteristic plainness: "Not a life lost and we have been through Hell."





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been a hallucination brought on by his own wounded leg. Or it may have been the final and complete conflation of cowboy mythology and the long, bitter history of sectarian murder in Ireland.

9

IN all the modern wars of faith and fatherland in Ireland, there has been one invariable rule: the wildest, most ostentatious killers have usually had something to prove. Patrick Pearse, who led the flamboyant Irish nationalist Easter Rising of 1916, had an English father and an English surname. Erskine Childers, one of the most violently implacable Irish nationalists in the civil war of 1922-23, was an Englishman and a former clerk of the House of Commons. The most vicious killer in the conflict in Northern Ireland during the last thirty years was the leader of a Protestant gang called the Shankill Butchers. He had the stereotypical Catholic name of Lenny Murphy and was taunted as a child by children who believed that he was really one of them.

Sometimes what drives such men is the zeal of the convert. More often, it is the need to deflect suspicions of disloyalty by going further, taking more risks, inflicting greater cruelty. But they also have glamour. Where others kill because they belong to a group at war, these men seem to have chosen their fate. They could have belonged to the other side. They could have walked away. But they chose not to. These men are rule breakers, border crossers. However brutally they behave, their actions have an air of liberation, of revolution, even of playfulness. They acquire a mythic status. They enter the folklore.

Billy the Kid was one. Even before he arrived in Lincoln County, he was blooded in the killing of his own kind. Francis Cahill, the first man he is known to have killed, was born in Galway during the Irish famine. In Arizona, in 1877, Cahill called the Kid a pimp; the Kid called Cahill a son of a bitch; and in the fight that followed Billy shot Cahill in the stomach. It was because of this killing that he started calling himself William Bonney and took off for New Mexico.

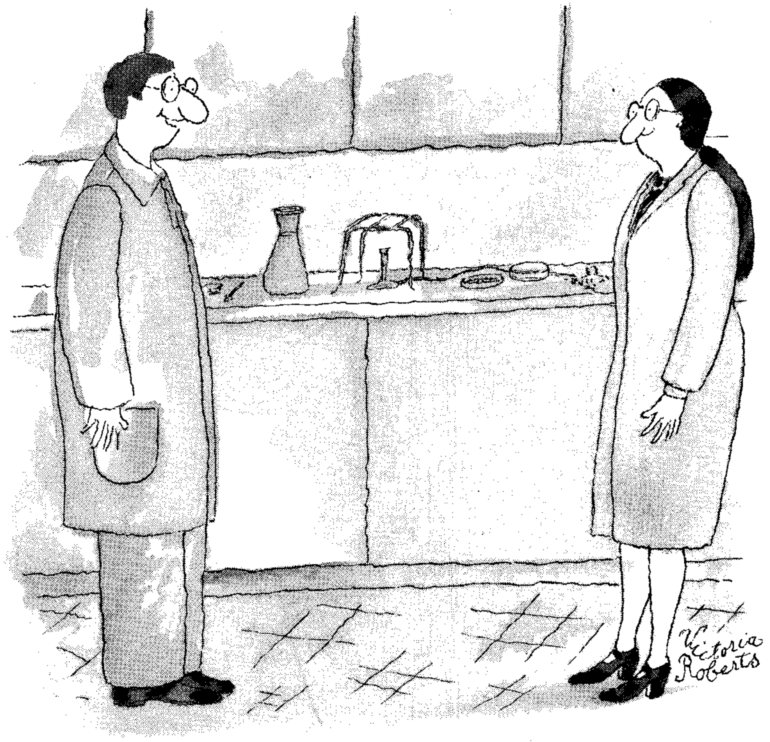
After Tunstall was murdered, the Kid joined McSween's Regulators. He was with them when they seized and executed two of the men suspected of killing Tunstall. He was with them, too, when they killed another associate of the Irish gang, Andrew Roberts, in a shoot-out. And he was one of six Regulators who hid themselves on Lincoln's main street on the morning of April Fool's Day, 1878, and gunned down Sheriff William Brady and one of his deputies as they passed by.

In all this, the Kid proved to be a capable horseman and an efficient gunman. But what distinguished him was his recklessness, his flamboyance, and, above all, his elusiveness. He had a genius for escaping tight corners, for slipping away from what seemed inevitable. Wounded in an exchange of fire that followed Brady's murder, he managed to ride out of town and avoid arrest. In the most fiercely fought battle, he, McSween, and the other Regulators were surrounded in McSween's house by Murphy's gang, who eventually managed to set fire to the building. McSween and others were shot down as they tried to flee. The Kid made it to safety. In 1881, when he was finally captured, sentenced to hang, and imprisoned in the House, he escaped again, killing two guards. Only by tracing him for six weeks and shooting him in the dark did Pat Garrett pin him down.

10

I AM on the second floor of the House, once the heart of the Irish empire in New Mexico, now a state museum. The Kid was held in a room nearby. At the foot of the stairs, I put my finger into the bullet hole made when Billy the Kid shot his guards and escaped. At the town's historical center, I find a glass case containing a sad jumble of objects. They were excavated from the site of McSween's house; archeologists digging in the remains found shards of charred pottery, pieces of metal kitchen utensils twisted and fused by the intense heat of the fire that burned down the house, and the gleaming remains of bullets. If the facts surrounding Billy the Kid's story seem to shift and waver, these objects, at least, are firm and scientific.

I came here because I thought that I could explain this violence, that because I am Irish I would know more about it than Americans do. I thought that by seeing Billy the Kid as an Irish Catholic in a sectarian war I could fix him more faithfully than the restless, contradictory American myths ever could. And to some extent I still think that this is so. The more I learn—the more carefully I scrutinize the letters and diaries and newspapers of the time—the more starkly the old hatreds of Catholic and Protestant, Irish and British, emerge.



"We're in our lab coats. Now what?"

But, as I look at the desultory remains from McSween's house, it strikes me how utterly universal they are. They could be from anywhere. From a burnt-out house in Belfast or Ballymoney, yes. But also in Srebrenica or Kigali, Soweto or Beirut. They are the mute remains of the twentieth century, the evidence of future excavations. They belong to no one in particular.

And I have to admit, too, that Billy the Kid doesn't fit so easily the archetype of the zealous convert, the man who changes sides and kills with more enthusiasm to prove his loyalty. At first, as I traced him, he seemed to belong precisely in this category, for he does in fact appear to have been a convert. There is evidence that Billy the Kid was baptized a Catholic, in St. Peter's Church in New York, but that by the time he and his mother got to New Mexico they had almost certainly converted to Presbyterianism.

When he was about thirteen, Billy the Kid (then Henry McCarty) was listed as a witness at his mother's wedding, in the First Presbyterian Church in Santa Fe, to William Henry Harrison Antrim. His stepfather's first three names are those of a Protestant American President. His last name is that of a county in what is now Northern Ireland. Almost certainly, his family was one of those who called themselves Scotch-Irish in the hope that they would not be confused with the ragged Famine Irish newcomers.

When the Kid was fighting for the Regulators, he attended Taylor Ealy's Presbyterian services, which were held in McSween's house. Ruth Ealy, the missionary's daughter, later remembered that her mother regarded the Kid as "a charming looking chap with splendid manners. He loved to sing in a beautiful tenor voice when he came to Sunday School, as he did when he happened to be in Lincoln."

The convert, the turncoat. Here is a man who has crossed from one side to the other and has to prove his new allegiance by the ferocity of his devotion.

And yet he seems to have been closest to the local Hispanics—every bit as Catholic as the Irishmen of the House. Many of the Hispanic people seem to have assumed that he was actually of their faith. Sista Salas Zamora, whose family sheltered the Kid after he escaped from Lincoln, insisted in later life that "he was a good Catholic." There is one account saying that when the Kid hid out in the village of San Patricio he spent hours in conversation with "the padre of the Roman Catholic Church, discussing religion and many other topics of interest."

And the Kid's allegiance to Tunstall's Protestant gang seems tenuous at best. The two men were not friends. In Tunstall's long, detailed letters to his family in London, he never mentions the Kid. And the Kid did not hear of Tunstall's death "before nightfall," as Garrett wrote, and then vow revenge. Instead, the Kid was there when it happened, hiding. In an affidavit he signed for the investigation into the killing, the Kid admitted that he was with Tunstall when he suddenly saw what he described as "a large party of men" coming toward them at full speed. He recognized some of them and knew how dangerous they were. The Kid, by his own account, ducked behind some rocks. He heard "two or three separate and distinct shots"—the sounds of Tunstall being shot through the head and chest. The killers took Tunstall's horse, put its master's hat on its head, and shot it as well. The message was clear: this was an execution. But the Kid did nothing. He was a hired hand, not an avenger.

The truth, perhaps, is that Billy the Kid didn't really care about religions or nations. He was not in it for faith or fatherland but for guns and money. This strange feud gave him a chance to perform, an excuse to kill, a living. Perhaps he was just a brilliant opportunist, a scrawny kid with few prospects who suddenly found himself in an exciting, dangerous place and decided to make the most of it. He seized the moment, improvised a destiny for himself, and kept moving until his luck ran out. Perhaps in that sense he really is an American archetype after all.

II

WHERE did the stories of the daring desperado killing Apaches and facing down Mexican gamblers come from? The easy answer is that Pat Garrett's ghostwriter made them up to glorify Garrett's achievement in killing not just a cheeky little punk but a legendary outlaw. But there is another possibility: that Henry McCarty, in the course of creating himself as Billy the Kid, told them himself.

The Kid was about eighteen when he arrived in Lincoln County. He was small—about five feet seven—thin, and boyish, with a silky, adolescent fuzz on his upper lip. He looked weak and easy to pick on, and Lincoln County was a place of hard men all too willing to exploit the vulnerable. No one knew him. No one knew much of his past. So he gave himself a new name and invented a life story: that of an intrepid, romantic, daring outlaw, no longer a skinny boy, a man you wouldn't want to mess with.

In an open place like this, where the rich past of the Mescalero and of the Hispanics has been violently erased, there is no history, only deeds. What matters is not who you are but what you do. You take your identity from the places in which you perform memorable actions. You kill a man in Lincoln and you become the Lincoln killer. You survive the massacre at McSween's house and you become the frontier survivor. You escape from the House and you become the great New Mexico escape artist. You are executed and buried at Fort Sumner and the place becomes your homeland.

Henry McCarty left behind the dark history of his family's Ireland, the shame of their famine and exile, and became Billy the Kid. He discarded the complicated religious animosities that for a Catholic convert to Presbyterianism must have been particularly hard to cope with. He invented a new identity, and, when the war broke out around him, he got the opportunity to live up to it.

He may have started out as an Irish cowboy, but he became an American cowboy. For he embodied the greatest of all American paradigms, that of the immigrant making a new life. He discovered that out here, where no one knows you, you are free to invent a life and call it authentic, to spin a story and find that others will tell it for you, to escape from history and enter the vast playground of myth. ♦

LIFE AND LETTERS

AN EXCHANGE

She was offended by "The Counterlife" and wonders if all Gentiles are anti-Semitic. He explains.

BY MARY McCARTHY AND PHILIP ROTH

75006 Paris
January 11, 1987

DEAR PHILIP:

Thank you for sending me your book which I started reading with excitement and enthusiasm that continued to mount through the sections in Israel and the El Al part, too, but that left me in England at Christmas-time, not to return, and I don't know why exactly. Perhaps you would have a better guess than I. It is probably never wise to give an author a negative or "qualified" opinion of his book, but I am moved to do so because I liked your last book, all parts of it, very, very much and I guess because I assumed that if you sent me your book it was because you were interested in my opinion of it.

So I will try to say what I think. The high point, for me, was the Hebron chapter, brilliant in every way and laying the whole problem—Israel—out with honesty and clarity. As I read, I kept contrasting it with an imaginary novel by Bellow. I also liked the earlier, dentist's office parts, the bifurcation of the Zuckerman figure, and the independent existence, like an angleworm's, achieved by the separate pieces. It seems to me a pity that this idea (unless I failed to understand) seems to have been lost sight of in "Gloucestershire" and "Christendom," which, on their own, wearied me. With what feels to me like pathology—a severe case of anti-anti-Semitism.

I remember Philip Rahv saying that all Gentiles, without exception, were anti-Semitic. If so, that is an awful problem for a Jewish novelist who wants to have Gentile characters in his work. Maybe the English sections of "The Counterlife" won't offend Jewish readers, but they irritated and offended me. I'm not a Christian (I don't believe in God), but to the extent that I am and can't help being (just as a "nice Jewish boy" can't help being Jewish), I bridle at your picture of Christianity. There's more to Christmas, that is, to the idea of the Incarnation, than Jew-hatred. True, I've sometimes thought that all our Christmas-caroling must be offensive to non-sharers in the bliss of that wondrous occasion. But perhaps non-sharers, those outside the Law, can get the general idea or try to, as I hope I would try to get the idea of the Wailing Wall, repellent as it is to me, if I were taken to it. And I confess that the crib with angels and animals and a star is to me a more sympathetic idea than the Wailing Wall; as a non-believer, I greatly prefer it. The residual Christian in me probably looks forward happily to the millennium and the conversion of the Jews, including Philip Roth. Philip Rahv, too.

Then all that circumcision business. Why so excited about making a child a Jew by taking a knife to him? I have nothing against circumcision; the men of my generation were all circumcised—a de-rigueur pediatric procedure—and my son's generation, too. It must have been Freudian influences somehow that in the forties persuaded educated people that circumcision was a superstition (I even heard it called a dirty Jewish superstition) which robbed the male of full sexual enjoyment in the pretended interest of hygiene. So then it became un-chic to have a baby boy circumcised. Religion did not enter into any of this, any more than it did into the breast-feeding, anti-breast-feeding discussion. And if Nathan Zuckerman *isn't* a believing Jew, why is he so hung up on this issue?

Forgive me if all this is disagreeable to you. It is strange to *me* that "The Counterlife" should remind me so forcibly that I am a Christian whatever I choose to imagine. The last time in my adult life that I felt anything like that was in Hanoi in 1968 with U.S. bombers overhead when I reacted, in the privacy of my thoughts, against the Marxist-Buddhist orthodoxy that I felt in the local leaders.

I am sorry that we never got together with Leon [Botstein] this past fall. Next year, I hope. I last saw him at a Christmas-carol singing, just before we flew back here.

Happy New Year, sincerely,
MARY

London SW10
January 17, 1987

DEAR MARY:

Thanks for writing at such length about the book. Of course I would want to know what you thought and that is indeed why I sent you the book, and I'm delighted that you have been so candid with me.

To begin with, it sounds as though you were held by an awful lot of it, virtually everything up to the last two chapters. I won't go into a discussion of why the structural idea was not abandoned in the last two chapters but in fact sealed and reinforced, since I think that would take too long and probably sound like a lecture, which I don't intend to deliver to you, of all people.

I happen to be known (to Jews) for having "a severe case of anti-anti-Semitism," as you claim to have yourself, *as does Zuckerman*. I think here all these issues seem to have struck you *outside* the narrative context and the thematic preoccupations of the book.

Let me take up your points one at a time.

1. Rahv's statement that all Gentiles are anti-Semitic. This is, of course, exactly what Zuckerman hears at Agor [a Jewish settlement on Israel's West Bank]. He is hardly sympathetic to that assertion. How could he have married Maria Freshfield if he were? Though that's the least of it: it simply runs counter to his experience, period. The irony, it seemed to me, was that, having been exposed to a kind of rhetoric he finds profoundly unpersuasive, he then comes

back to London and runs smack into Maria's sister and her hymn of hate. There is then the incident at the restaurant and the conversation with Maria [about English anti-Semitism] that gets so hopelessly out of hand. None of this is evidence that all Gentiles are anti-Semitic. But it does force Zuckerman to deal with a phenomenon previously unknown to him, though hardly unknown in the world (or in England, for that matter). I wanted him astonished, caught off-balance, *educated.* I wanted him threatened with the loss of this woman he adores because of this stinking, hideous old problem that seems to have turned up right at the heart of the family into which he has married. Truly, I don't see what there is to be offended by there, and maybe it wasn't quite this that offended and irritated you.

A non-believing Christian and Jew, perplexed by the power of Christmas.

MICHAEL WITTE

2. "There's more to Christmas, that is, to the idea of the Incarnation, than Jew-hatred." But Zuckerman doesn't say there isn't. He does, however, articulate (for the first time anywhere in fiction, as far as I know) how many a Jew happens to feel when confronted with this stuff. Whether justified or not, he is mildly affronted, and what he says is not quite what you suggest he says. "But between me and *church devotion* [*not* the incarnation] there is an unbridgeable world of feeling, a natural and thoroughgoing incompatibility—I have the emotions of a spy in the adversary's camp and feel I'm overseeing the very rites that *embody the ideology* that's been responsible for the persecution and mistreatment of Jews.... I just find the religion... profoundly inappropriate, and never more so than when the congregants are observing the highest standards of liturgical decorum and the clerics most beautifully enunciating the doctrine of love." (I've added the italics.) Now, you may not think such reasoning is sound, but that even an intelligent Jew is capable of reasoning in just that way is a fact. I was trying to be truthful.

3. "... As a non-believer, I greatly prefer it," you say, meaning "the crib with angels and animals and a star" to "the Wailing Wall." That is again where you and Zuckerman part company. As a non-believer, he prefers neither. He finds little to recommend the sanctification of either set of icons or symbols or whatever they all are taken together. Furthermore, Zuckerman behaves beautifully at the carol service and therefore *looks* at least as you might look at the Wailing Wall, where you say you would try to get the idea, repellent as it is to you. I think you have—a word I hate—overreacted to these few observations, which he himself knows are determined by his Jewishness and nothing more. "Yet, Jewishly, I still thought, what do they *need* all this stuff for?" His objections really are aesthetic, aren't they? "Though frankly I've always felt that the place where Christianity gets dangerously, vulgarly obsessed with the miraculous is Easter, the Nativity has always struck me as a close second to the Resurrection in nakedly addressing the most childish need." You say you bridle at my picture of Christianity, and if you bridle at this, so be it. But you do see it has nothing to do, or not much to do, with "Jew-hatred."

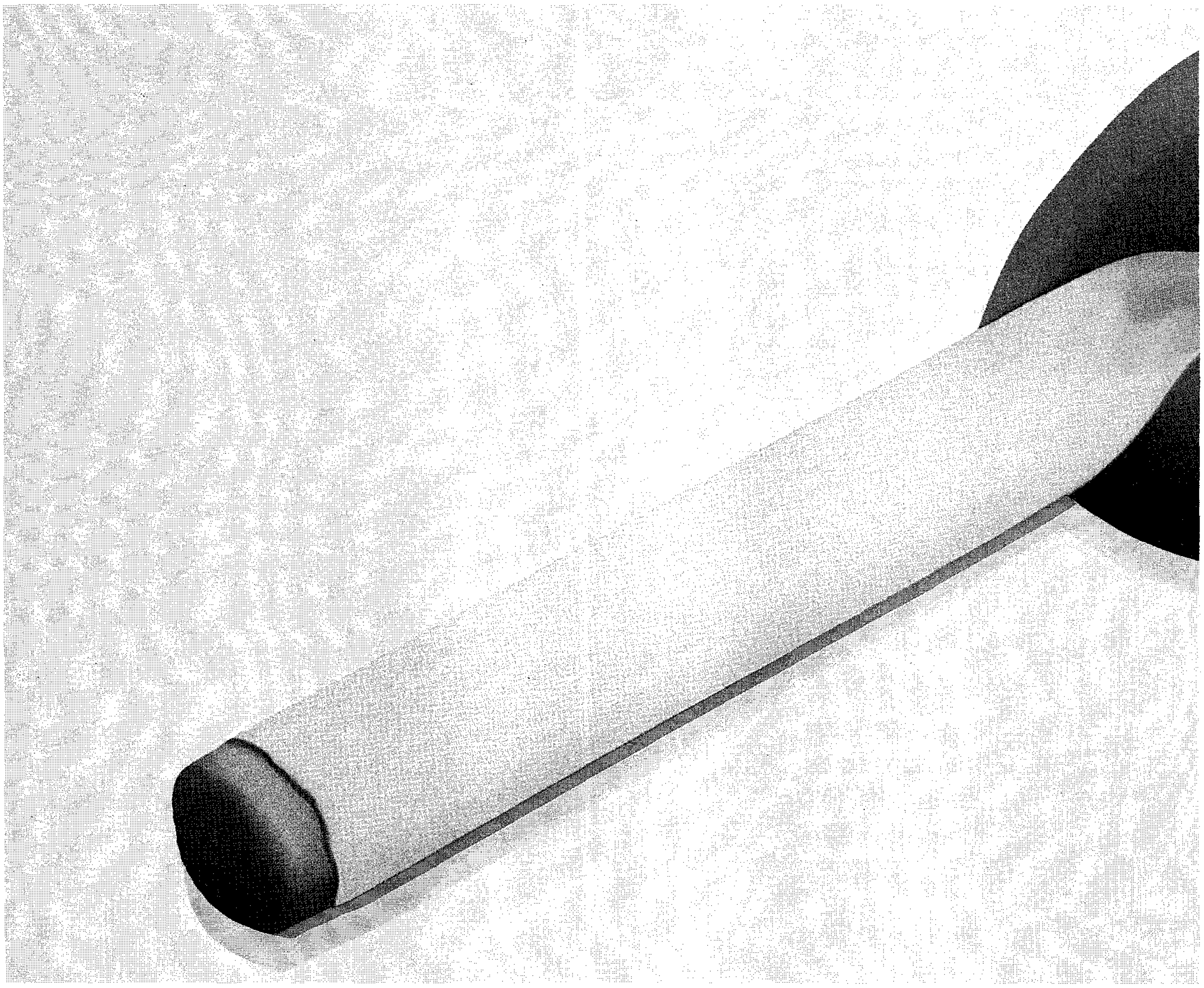
Now to speak only as a novelist (which I am far more than I am a Jew). If Zuckerman hadn't gone to [Agor in] Judea and heard what he heard there I would never have had this scene in the church or have had him think these thoughts. But it seemed to me only fair that—no, I don't mean that: it seemed to me simply that the one scene called forth the other. I didn't want all his skepticism focused on Jewish ritual and none of it on Christian. That would have had all the wrong implications and made him seem what he is not, and that is a self-hating Jew who—to borrow a phrase—casts a cold eye only on his own.

4. "Why so excited about making a child a Jew by taking a knife to him?" Context, context, context. This is his response, his aggressive and angry response, to the suggestion that his child will have to be christened in order to please Maria's mother. The paean to circumcision arises out of that threat. If you won't listen to me on this subject, listen to Maria.... "If it's this that establishes for you the truth of your paternity—that regains for you the truth of your *own* paternity—so be it." Here I was thinking thoughts that the reader can hardly be expected to follow. I was thinking about Zuckerman and his own father, and the word *bastard* that the old man Zuckerman whispers at N. from his deathbed. The circumcision of little English-American Z. is big American Z. settling that issue at last. That is my business, I suppose, but it figured in the thing.

I think you also fail to see how serious this circumcision business is to Jews. I am still hypnotized by uncircumcised men when I see them at my swimming pool locker room. The damn thing never goes unregistered. Most Jewish men I know have similar reactions, and when I was writing the book, I asked several of my equally secular Jewish male friends if they could have an uncircumcised son, and they all said no, sometimes without having to think about it and sometimes after the nice long pause that any rationalist takes before opting for the irrational. Why is N.Z. hung up on circumcision? I hope that's clearer now.

5. "Forgive me if all this is disagreeable to you." I would have had to forgive you if you had been "agreeable."

Yours,
PHILIP ◆



TOM WESSELMANN'S "MOUTH #11," 1967, OIL ON

FICTION

SEXY

The high intoxication of love.

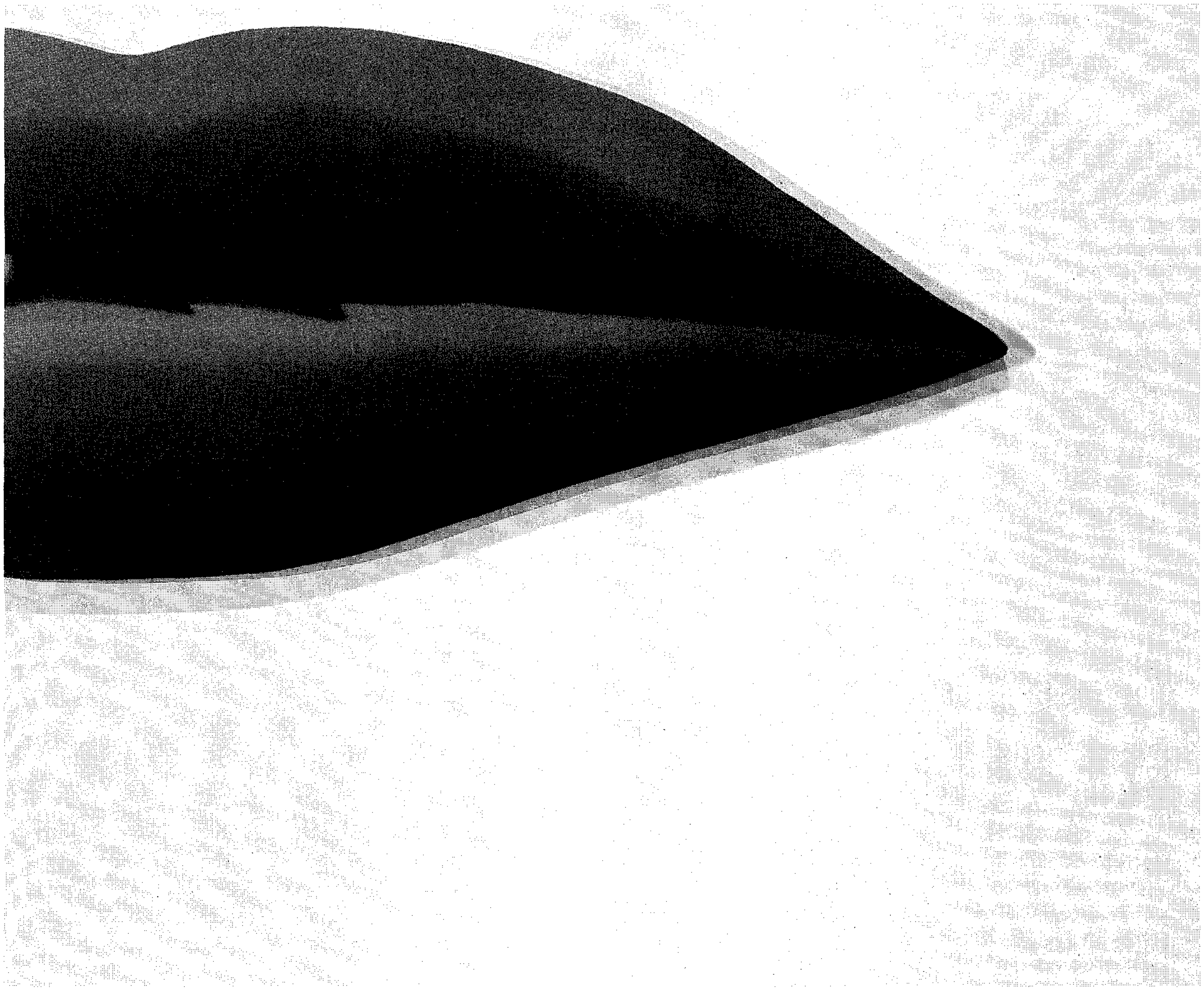
BY JHUMPA LAHIRI

IT was a wife's worst nightmare. After nine years of marriage, Laxmi told Miranda, her cousin's husband had fallen in love with another woman. He sat next to her on a plane, on a flight from Delhi to Montreal, and instead of flying home to his wife and son he got off with the woman at Heathrow. He called his wife and told her he'd had a conversation that had changed his life, and that he needed time to figure things out. Laxmi's cousin had taken to her bed.

"Not that I blame her," Laxmi said. She reached for the Hot Mix she munched throughout the day, which looked to Miranda like dusty orange cereal. "Imagine. An English girl, half his age." Laxmi was only a few years older than Miranda, but she was already married, and kept a photo of herself and her husband, seated on a white stone bench in front of the Taj Mahal, tacked to the inside of her cubicle, which was next to Miranda's. Laxmi had been on the phone for at least an hour, trying to calm her cousin down. No one noticed; they worked for a public-radio station, in the fund-raising department, and were surrounded by people who spent all day on the phone, soliciting pledges.

"I feel worst for the boy," Laxmi added. "He's been at home for days. My cousin said she can't even take him to school."

"It sounds awful," Miranda said. Normally Laxmi's phone conversations distracted Miranda as she typed letters. She could hear Laxmi clearly, her sentences peppered every now and then with an Indian word, through the laminated wall between their desks. But that afternoon Miranda hadn't been listening.



She'd been on the phone herself, with Dev, deciding where to meet later that evening.

"Then again, a few days at home won't hurt him." Laxmi ate some more Hot Mix, then put it away in a drawer. "He's something of a genius. He has a Punjabi mother and a Bengali father, and because he learns French and English at school he already speaks four languages. I think he skipped two grades."

Dev was Bengali, too. At first, Miranda thought it was a religion. But then he pointed it out to her, a place in India called Bengal, on a map printed in an issue of *The Economist*. He'd shown her the city where he'd been born. It had a box around it, intended to attract the reader's eye. When Miranda asked what the box indicated, Dev rolled up the magazine and said, "Nothing you'll ever need to worry about," tapping her playfully on the head.

Before leaving her apartment, he'd tossed the magazine in the garbage, along with the ends of the three cigarettes he always smoked. But after she watched his car disappear down Commonwealth Avenue, back to his house in the suburbs, where he lived with his wife, Miranda retrieved it, and brushed the ashes off. She got into bed, still rumpled from their lovemaking, and studied the borders of Bengal. There was a bay below it, and mountains above. She turned the page, hoping for a photograph of the city where Dev was born, but all she found were graphs and grids. Still, she stared at them, thinking the whole while about Dev, about how only fifteen minutes ago he'd propped her feet on top of his shoulders, and pressed her knees to her chest, and told her that he couldn't get enough of her.

She'd met him a week ago, at Filene's. She was there on her lunch break, buying discounted panty hose in the Basement. Afterward she took the escalator to the main part of the store, to the cosmetics department, where soaps and creams were displayed like jewels, and eyeshadows and powders shimmered like butterflies pinned behind protective glass. Though Miranda had never bought anything other than a lipstick, she liked walking through the cramped, confined maze, which was familiar to her in a way the rest of Boston was not. She liked negotiating her way past the women spraying cards with perfume; sometimes she'd find a card days afterward, folded in her coat pocket, and the rich aroma, still faintly preserved, would warm her as she waited on cold mornings for the T.

That day Miranda had noticed a man standing at one of the counters. He held a slip of paper covered in a precise, feminine hand. A saleswoman took one look at the paper and began to open drawers. She produced an oblong cake of soap in a black case, a hydrating mask, a vial of cell-renewal drops, and two tubes of face cream. The man was tan, with black hair that was visible on his knuckles. He wore a flamingo-pink shirt, a navy-blue suit, a camel overcoat with gleaming leather buttons. In order to pay he had taken off pigskin gloves. Crisp bills emerged from a burgundy wallet. He didn't wear a wedding ring.

"What can I get you, honey?" the saleswoman asked Miranda. She looked over the tops of her tortoiseshell glasses, assessing Miranda's complexion.

Miranda didn't know what she wanted. All she knew was that she didn't want the man to walk away. He seemed to be lingering, waiting, along with the saleswoman, for her to say something. She stared at some bottles, some short, others tall, arranged on an oval tray, like a family posing for a photograph.

"A cream," Miranda said eventually.

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-two."

The saleswoman nodded, opening a frosted bottle. "This may seem a bit heavier than what you're used to, but I'd start now. All your wrinkles are going to form by twenty-five. After that they just start showing."

While the saleswoman dabbed the cream on Miranda's face, telling her the proper way to apply it, the man stood and watched, spinning the lipstick carrousel. He pressed a pump that dispensed cellulite gel and massaged it into the back of his ungloved hand. He opened a jar, leaned over, and drew so close that a drop of cream flecked his nose.

Miranda smiled, but her mouth was obscured by a large brush that the saleswoman was sweeping over her face. "This is blusher Number Two," the woman said. "Gives you some color."

Miranda nodded, glancing at her reflection in one of the angled mirrors that lined the counter. She had silver eyes and skin pale as paper, and the contrast with her hair, dark and glossy as an espresso bean, caused people to describe her as striking, if not pretty. She had a narrow, egg-shaped head that rose to a prominent point. Her features, too, were narrow, with nostrils so slim that they appeared to have been pinched with a clothespin. Now her face glowed, rosy at the cheeks, smoky below the brow bone. Her lips glistened.

The man was glancing in a mirror, too, quickly wiping the cream from his nose. Miranda wondered where he was from. She thought he might be Spanish, or Lebanese. When he opened another jar and said, to no one in particular, "This one smells like pineapple," she detected only the hint of an accent.

The woman wrapped the cream in several layers of red tissue. "You'll be very happy with this product." Miranda's hand was unsteady as she signed the receipt. The man hadn't budged.

"I threw in a sample of our new eye gel," the saleswoman added. She looked at Miranda's credit card before sliding it across the counter. "Bye-bye, Miranda."

Miranda began walking. At first she sped up. Then, noticing the doors that led to Downtown Crossing, she slowed down.

"Part of your name is Indian," the man said, pacing his steps with hers.

She stopped. "Miranda?"

"Mira. I have an aunt named Mira."

His name was Dev. He worked in an investment bank back that way, he said, tilting his head in the direction of South Station. He was the first man with a mustache, Miranda decided, she found handsome.

They walked together toward Park Street Station. A fierce January wind spoiled the part in her hair. As she fished for a token in her coat pocket her eyes fell to his shopping bag. "And those are for her?"

"Who?"

"Your Aunt Mira."

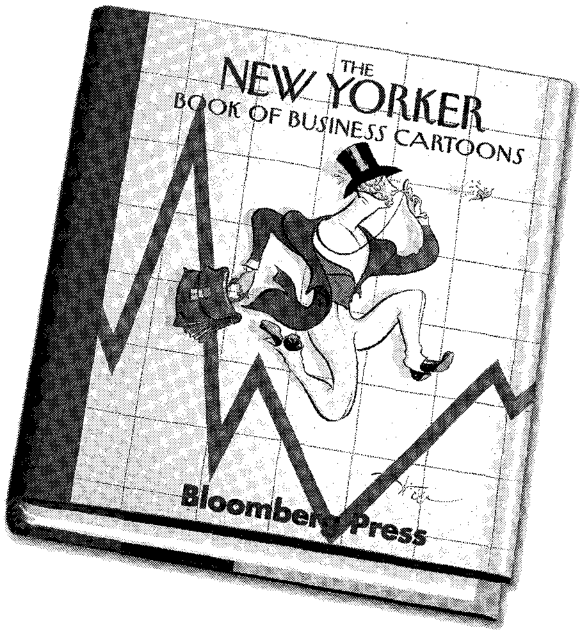
"They're for my wife." He uttered the words slowly, holding Miranda's gaze. "She's going to India for a few weeks." He rolled his eyes. "She's addicted to this stuff."

SOMEHOW, without the wife there, it didn't seem so wrong. At first Miranda and Dev spent every night together, almost. He explained that he couldn't spend the whole night at her place, because his wife called every day at six in the morning, from India, where it was four in the afternoon. And so he left her apartment at two, three, often as late as four in the morning, driving back to the suburbs. During the day he called her every hour, it seemed, from work, or from his cell phone. Once he learned Miranda's schedule he left her a message each evening at five-thirty, when she was on the T coming back to her apartment, just so, he said, she could hear his voice as soon as she walked through the door. "I'm thinking about you," he'd say on the tape. "I can't wait to see you." He told her he liked spending time in her apartment, with its kitchen counter no wider than a breadbox and scratchy floors that sloped. He said he admired her for moving to Boston, where she knew no one, instead of remaining in Michigan, where she'd grown up and gone to college. When Miranda told him it was nothing to admire, that she'd moved to Boston precisely for that reason, he shook his head. "I know what it's like to be lonely," he said, suddenly serious, and at that moment Miranda felt that he understood her—understood how she felt some nights, after seeing a movie on her own, or going to a bookstore to read magazines. In less serious moments Dev said he liked that her legs were longer than her torso, something he'd observed the first time she walked across a room naked. "You're the first," he told her, admiring her from the bed. "The first woman I've known with legs this long."

Unlike the boys she dated in college, who were simply taller, heavier versions of the ones she dated in high school, Dev was the first always to pay for things, and hold doors open, and reach across a table in a restaurant to kiss her hand. He was the first to whisper her name again and again when they made love. Within days of meeting him, when she was at work Miranda began to wish that there were a picture of her and Dev tacked to the inside of her cubicle. She didn't tell Laxmi about Dev. She didn't tell anyone. Part of her wanted to tell Laxmi, if only because Laxmi was Indian, too. But Laxmi was always on the phone with her cousin these days. When she wasn't speaking to her cousin she spoke to her husband, shorter conversations, in which she ended up arguing about whether to have chicken or lamb for dinner. "I'm sorry," Miranda heard her apologize at one point. "This whole thing just makes me a little paranoid."

Miranda and Dev didn't argue. They

Very funny business, indeed!



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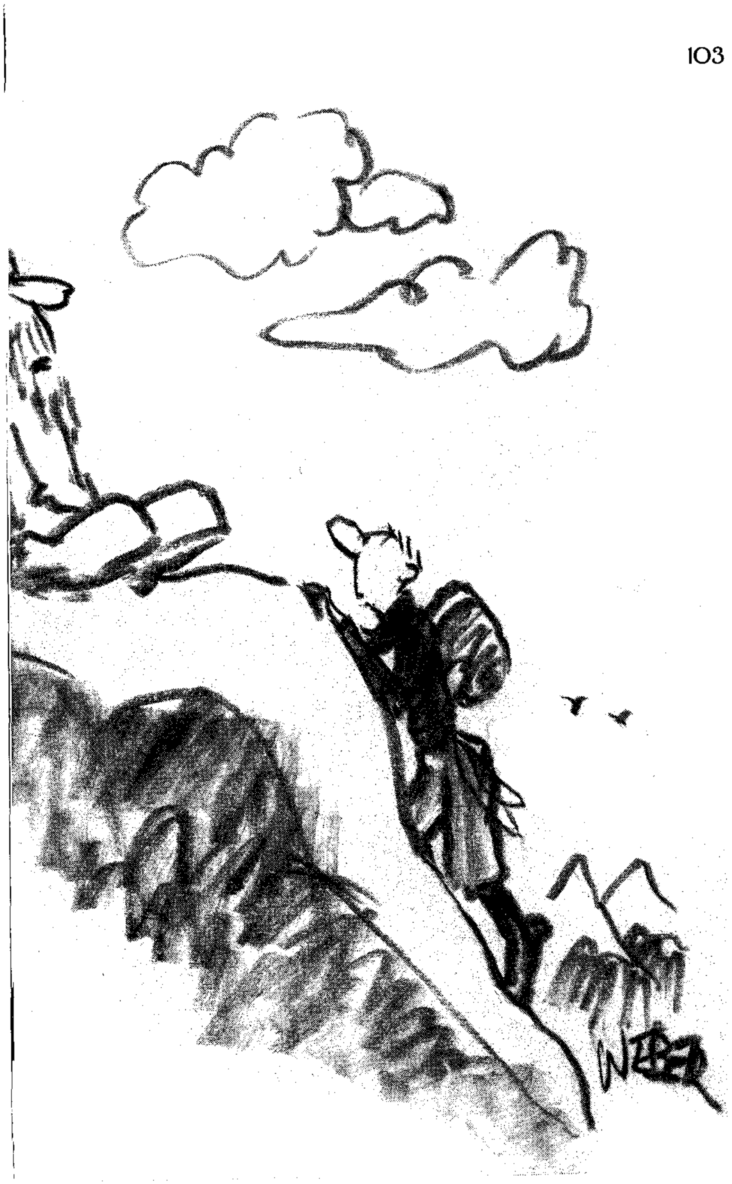

"It's all in my book, but it's out of print."

• •

ne she heard them so
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r coat, so near and full
she felt herself go hot.
ispered, unsure of what

he whispered back.

following week, Laxmi
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," Laxmi said, shaking
me. If my husband so
at another woman I'd
change the locks." She turned to Miranda. "Wouldn't you?"

She nodded. Dev's wife was coming back from India the next day. That afternoon he'd called Miranda at work, to say he had to go to the airport to pick her up. He promised he'd call as soon as he could.

"What's the Taj Mahal like?" she asked Laxmi.

"The most romantic spot on earth." Laxmi's face brightened at the memory. "An everlasting monument to love."

WHILE Dev was at the airport, Miranda went to Filene's Basement to buy herself things she thought a mistress should have. She found a pair of black high heels with buckles smaller than a baby's teeth. She found a satin slip with scalloped edges, a knee-length silk robe, and sheer stockings with a seam. She searched through piles and wandered through racks, pressing back hanger after hanger, until she found a cocktail dress made of a slinky silvery material that matched her eyes, with little chains for straps. As she shopped she thought about Dev, and about what he'd told her. It was the first time a man had called her sexy, and when she closed her eyes she could still feel his whisper drifting through her body, under her skin. In the fitting room she found a spot next to an older woman with a shiny face and coarse, frosted hair. The woman stood barefoot in her underwear, pulling the black net of a body stocking taut between her fingers.

"Always check for snags," the woman advised.

Miranda pulled out the satin slip. She held it to her chest.

The woman nodded with approval. "Oh yes."

"And this?" She held up the silver cocktail dress.

"Absolutely," the woman said. "He'll want to rip it right off you."

Miranda pictured the two of them at a restaurant in the South End they'd been to, where Dev had ordered foie gras and a soup made with champagne and raspberries. She pictured herself in the cocktail dress, and Dev in one of his suits, kissing her hand across the table. Only the next time Dev came to visit her, on a Sunday afternoon, he was in gym clothes. After his wife came back, that was his excuse: on Sundays he drove into Boston and went running along the Charles. The first Sunday she opened the door in the knee-length robe, but Dev didn't even notice it; he carried her over to the bed, and entered her without a word. Later, she slipped on the robe when she walked across the room, but he complained that she was depriving him of the sight of her long legs, and demanded that she remove it. So the next Sunday she didn't bother. She wore jeans. She kept the lingerie at the back of a drawer, behind her socks and everyday underwear. The silver cocktail dress hung in her closet, the tag dangling from the seam.

Still, Miranda looked forward to Sundays. In the mornings she went to a deli and bought a baguette and little containers of things Dev liked to eat, like pickled herring and potato salad. They ate in bed, picking up the herring with their fingers and ripping the baguette with their hands. Dev told her stories about his childhood, when he would come home from school and drink mango juice served to him on a tray, and then play cricket by a lake, dressed all in white. He told her about how, at eighteen, he'd been sent to a college in upstate New York during something called the Emergency, and about how it took him years to be able to follow American accents in movies. As he talked he smoked. Sometimes he asked her questions, like how many lovers she'd had (three) and how old she'd been the first time (nineteen). After lunch they made love, on sheets covered with crumbs, and then Dev took a nap for twelve minutes. Miranda had never known an adult who took naps, but Dev said it was something he'd grown up doing in India, where it was so hot that people didn't leave their homes until the sun went down. "Plus it allows us to sleep together," he murmured mischievously, curving his arm like a big bracelet around her body.

Only Miranda never slept. She watched the clock on her bedside table, or pressed her face against Dev's fingers, intertwined with hers, each with its half-dozen hairs at the knuckle. After six minutes she turned to face him, sighing and stretching, to test if he was really sleeping. He always was. His ribs were visible through his skin as he breathed, and yet he was beginning to develop a paunch. He complained about the hair on his shoulders, but Miranda thought him perfect, and refused to imagine him any other way.

At the end of twelve minutes Dev would open his eyes as if he'd been awake all along, smiling at her, full of a contentment she wished she felt herself. "The best twelve minutes of the week," he'd sigh, running a hand along the backs of her calves. Then he'd spring out of bed, pulling on his sweatpants and lacing up his sneakers. He would go to the bathroom and brush his teeth with his index finger, something he told her all Indians knew how to do, to get rid of the smoke in his mouth. When she kissed him goodbye she smelled herself sometimes in his hair. But she knew that his excuse, that he'd spent the afternoon jogging, allowed him to take a shower when he got home, first thing.

APART from Laxmi and Dev, the only Indians Miranda had known were a family in the neighborhood where she'd grown up, named the Dixits. Much to the amusement of the neighborhood children, Mr. Dixit would jog each eve-

TREE WITH ORNAMENTS BY MY MOTHER

It could be a wintering bear this year,
long furred & yet unclassified fat fir, rearing
uncrouched by the couch, a bear cub, my first—
a Douglas?—first ever long-needle pine & name unknown.

So thickly fern-broom-, borzoi- or yak-feathered,
whisks under eaves, that ornaments disappear:
the forest of branches has made an interior,
all of her ornaments inside in, and not shown.

But let them try to remain hidden: glass-bird
light paint glows like a house in the woods at four,
snowbound-warm and excited given. It hides this year
but desires to be seen—makes no grief—to be spoken.

This year's tree makes its scent felt across the yards
in between; the past at last has remade the present. *Hark
not to the shining idols* but to their singular deity, inward
invisible bird fir fragrance, who says they could even be broken.

—ELIZABETH MACKLIN

ning along the flat winding streets of their development in his everyday shirt and trousers, his only concession to athletic apparel being a pair of cheap Keds. Every weekend, the family—mother, father, two boys, and a girl—piled into their car and went away, to where nobody knew. The fathers complained that Mr. Dixit did not fertilize his lawn properly, or rake his leaves on time, that the Dixits' house, the only one with vinyl siding, detracted from the neighborhood's charm. The mothers never invited Mrs. Dixit to join them around the Armstrongs' swimming pool. Waiting for the school bus with the Dixit children standing to one side, the other children would say "The Dixits dig shit" under their breath, and then burst into laughter.

One year, all the neighborhood children were invited to the birthday party of the Dixit girl. Miranda remembered an aroma of incense and onions heavy in the house, and a pile of shoes heaped by the front door. But most of all she remembered a piece of fabric, about the size of a pillowcase, which hung from a wooden dowel at the bottom of the stairs. It was a painting of a naked woman with a red face shaped like a knight's shield. She had enormous white eyes that tilted toward her temples, and mere dots for pupils. Two circles, with the same dots at their centers, indicated her breasts. In one hand she brandished a dagger. With one foot she crushed a struggling man on the ground. Around her body was a necklace composed of bleeding heads, strung together like a popcorn chain. She stuck her tongue out at Miranda.

"It is the goddess Kali," Mrs. Dixit explained brightly, shifting the dowel slightly in order to straighten the image. Mrs. Dixit's hands were painted with henna, an intricate pattern of zigzags and stars. "Come please, time for cake."

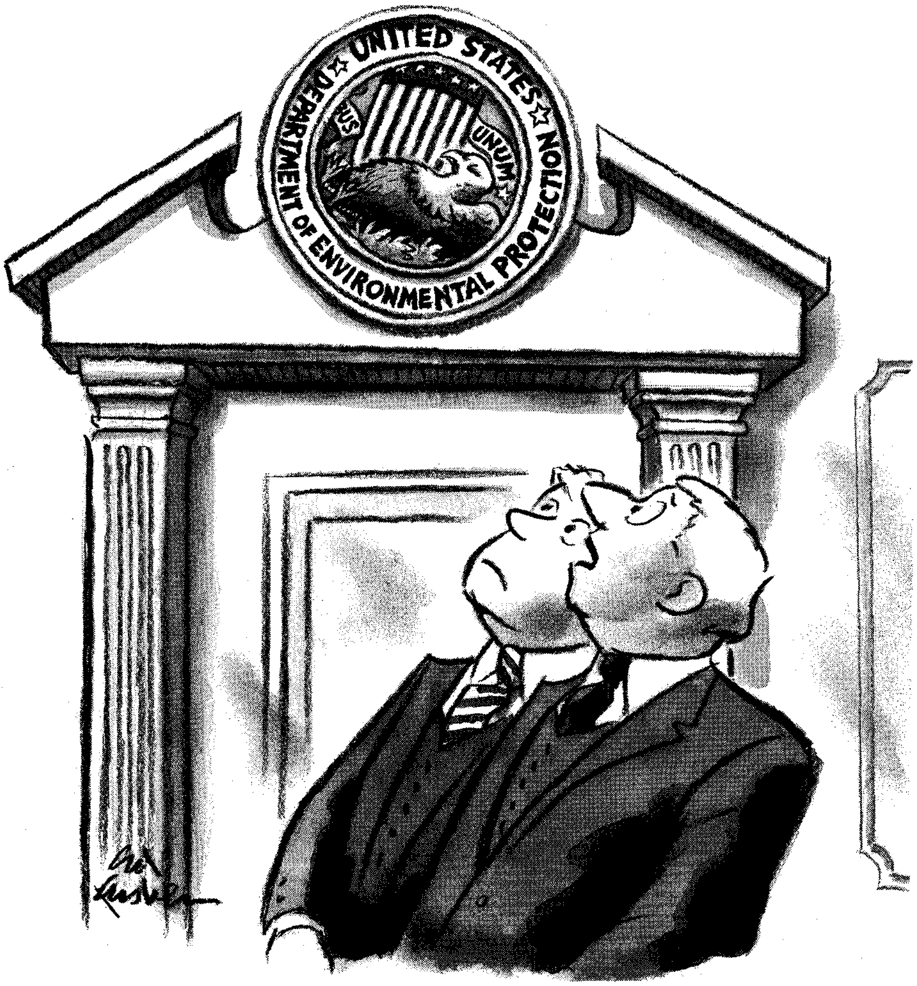
Miranda, then nine years old, had been too frightened to eat the cake. For months afterward she'd been too frightened even to walk on the same side of the street as the Dixits' house.

It shamed her now. Now, when she and Dev made love, Miranda closed her eyes and saw deserts and elephants, and marble pavilions floating on lakes beneath a full moon. One Saturday, having nothing else to do, she walked to Central Square, to an Indian restaurant, and ordered a plate of tandoori chicken. As she ate she tried to memorize phrases printed at the bottom of the menu, for things like "delicious" and "water" and "check, please." She began to stop in a bookstore in Kenmore Square, where she studied the Bengali alphabet in the Teach Yourself series. Once she tried to transcribe the Indian part of her name, "Mira," into her Filofax, her hand moving in unfamiliar directions. Following the arrows in the book, she drew a bar from left to right from which the letters hung; one looked more like a number than a letter, another like a triangle on its side. It had taken her several tries, and even then she wasn't sure if she'd written Mira or Mara. It was a scribble to her, but somewhere in the world, she realized with a shock, it meant something.

DURING the week it wasn't so bad. Work kept her busy, and she and Laxmi had begun having lunch together at a new Indian restaurant around the corner, during which Laxmi reported the latest status of her cousin's marriage. Sometimes Miranda tried to change the topic, but Laxmi spoke of nothing else. "If I were her I'd fly straight to London and shoot them both," she announced one day. She snapped a *papadam* in half and dipped it into chutney. "I don't know how she can just wait this way."

Miranda knew how to wait. In the evenings she sat at her dining table and coated her nails with clear nail polish, and watched television, and waited for Sunday. Saturdays were the worst, because by Saturday it seemed that Sunday would never come. One Saturday when Dev called, late at night, she heard people laughing and talking in the background. "I can't hear you that well," he said. "We have guests. Miss me?" She imagined him whispering into his cell phone, in a room upstairs, a hand on the doorknob, the hallway filled with guests. "Miranda, do you miss me?" he asked again. She told him that she did.

The next day, when Dev came to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"Uh-oh."

visit, Miranda asked him what his wife looked like. She was nervous to ask, waiting until he'd smoked the last of his cigarettes, crushing it with a firm twist into the saucer. She wondered if they'd quarrel. But Dev wasn't surprised by the question. He told her, spreading some smoked whitefish on a cracker, that his wife resembled an actress in Bombay named Madhuri Dixit. For an instant Miranda's heart stopped. But no, the Dixit girl had been named something else, something that began with "P." Still, she wondered if the actress and the Dixit girl were related. She'd been plain, wearing her hair in two braids all through high school.

A few days later Miranda went to an Indian grocery in Central Square that also rented videos. It was dinnertime and she was the only customer. A video was playing on a television hooked up in a corner of the store: a row of young women in harem pants were thrusting their hips in synchrony on a beach.

"Can I help you?" the man standing at the cash register asked. He was eating a *samosa*, dipping it into some dark-brown sauce on a paper plate. Below the glass counter at his waist were trays of more plump *samosas*. "You like some video?"

Miranda opened up her Filofax where she had written down "Mottery Dixit." She looked up at the videos on the shelves behind the counter. She saw women wearing skirts that sat low on their hips and tops that tied like bandannas between their breasts. Some leaned back against a stone wall, or a tree. They were beautiful, with kohl-rimmed eyes and long black hair. She knew then that Madhuri Dixit was beautiful, too.

"We have subtitled versions, Miss," the man continued. He wiped his fingertips quickly on his shirt and pulled out three titles.

"No," Miranda said. "Thank you, no." She wandered through the little store, studying shelves lined with unlabelled packets and tins and with vegetables she didn't recognize. The only thing she did recognize was bags of the Hot Mix that Laxmi was always eating. She thought about buying some for Laxmi, then hesitated, wondering how to explain what she'd been doing in an Indian grocery.

"Very spicy," the man said, shaking his head, his eyes travelling across Miranda's body. "Too spicy for you."

BY February Laxmi's cousin's husband still hadn't come to his senses. He had returned to Montreal, argued bitterly with his wife for two weeks, packed two suitcases, and flown back to London. He wanted a divorce.

Miranda sat in her cubicle and listened as Laxmi kept telling her cousin that there were better men in the world, just waiting to come out of the woodwork. The next day the cousin said she and her son were going to her parents' house in California, to try to recuperate. Laxmi convinced her to arrange a weekend layover in Boston. "A quick change of place will do you good," Laxmi insisted gently, "besides which, I haven't seen you in years."

Miranda stared at her own phone, wishing Dev would call. It had been four days since their last conversation. She heard Laxmi dialling directory assistance, asking for the number of a beauty salon. "Something soothing," Laxmi requested. She scheduled massages, facials, manicures, and pedicures. Then she reserved a table for lunch at the Four Seasons. In her determination to cheer up her cousin, Laxmi had forgotten about the boy. She rapped her knuckles on the laminated wall.

"Are you busy Saturday?"

THE boy was thin. He wore a yellow knapsack strapped across his back, gray herringbone trousers, a red V-neck sweater, and black leather shoes. His hair was cut in a thick fringe over his eyes, which had dark circles under them. They were the first thing Miranda noticed. They made him look haggard, as if he smoked a great deal and slept very little, in spite of the fact that he was only seven years old. He clasped a large sketch pad with a spiral binding. His name was Rohin.

"Ask me a capital," he said, staring up at Miranda.

She stared back at him. It was eight-thirty on a Saturday morning. She took a sip of coffee. "A what?"

"It's a game he's been playing," Laxmi's cousin explained. She was thin like her son, with a long face and the same dark circles under her eyes. Her black hair, with a few strands of gray

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WINTER TALE

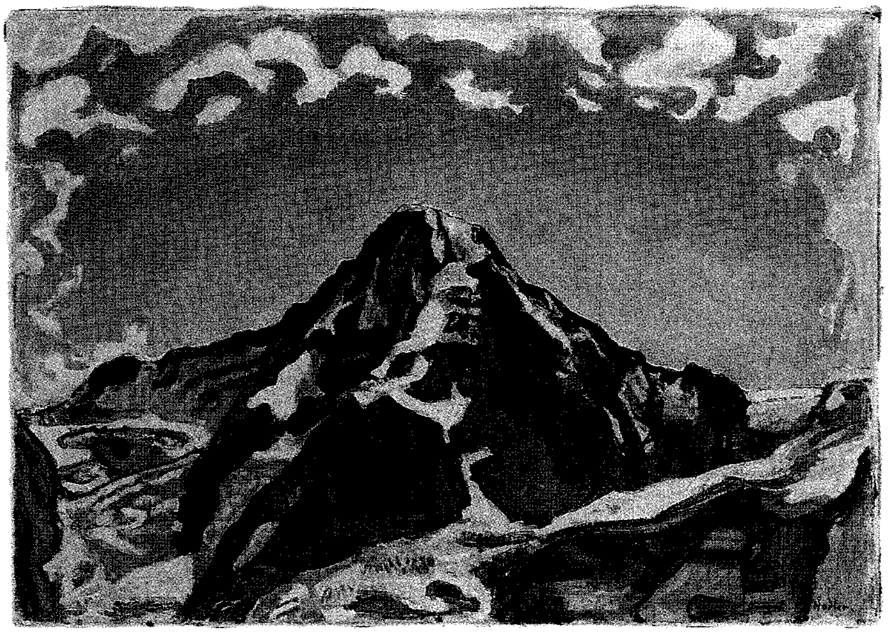
SANTA'S COPTER

TWO years ago, around this time, my wife, Rita, and I decided to take a winter walk to celebrate having settled an argument. Although it was December, it had snowed only once that winter, and had then thawed immediately, so that the distant mountains had a rocky, clean look to them. We drove from our home in Verona to Giazza, a gloomily picturesque village at the foot of the Alps, then began a climb to a sunny refuge at five thousand feet, which offered a marvellous panorama of the Po Valley. At the bottom of the path, a tall local girl stopped and stared at us, opened her mouth, closed it, and went on her way.

We thought nothing of it. We knew the path well—the E5, not an *autostrada* but a *Wanderweg*, which takes hikers from the Adriatic to Munich. It is one of the most famous paths in Europe and never very difficult. Soon the crunch of our feet on leaves speckled with sunshine, and the sudden glimpses of vast landscapes between outcrops of rock and gorse, told us that we had done the right thing. The winter world was huge and peaceful. Between this state of bliss and catastrophe lay five minutes of oneiric folly.

Just before the path arrives at a ledge below the refuge, it twists and narrows, with a high, curving wall looming on one side and a ravine falling away on the other. Beyond the ledge, a steep gully ascends to the final plateau, a hundred feet above. But because this part of the path is always in the shade the one snowfall had not melted here; rather it had turned to ice. Suddenly, we were crawling on all fours—about twenty yards—up a hard slippery surface to the ledge. We turned the corner, convinced that we were home and dry, but found that the gully ahead was blocked with frozen snow. Then, behind me, my wife said, "We can't go back." She was right. It was one thing to crawl up that ice, another to imagine getting back down: we could see now that the slightest slip would send us tumbling into a ravine many hundreds of feet deep. We were stuck on a ledge about eighteen inches wide and four feet long.

Hands wave at a blue sky. It's a dazzling, snow-bright landscape. The camera tracks around the cliff face. Then a sudden explosion of sound tells you that the helicopter has arrived. There is frantic shouting, the spilling of ropes, the straining of winches, that obligatory moment when someone almost makes a mistake—but only almost—until finally a lovely girl flops into a strong man's arms in the womblike hold of the copter. . . . And in the warm, dark cinema you're relieved, but not so relieved. You knew that only people who were unimportant or evil would fall from cliffs. Not the lead actors. Not, for example, the main protagonist in your life these fifteen years, who is hardly evil, despite a tiff or two. What kind of script would that make?



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What films can only hint at is the passage of time, the increasing cold, the realization of one's own utter stupidity. That wonderful mountain landscape lost all its appeal. After an hour or so, the deep silence was broken by an even scarier crack. As it turned some unimaginable corner, a ray of sunshine was warming the top of the overhanging cliff. A lump of stone bounced at our feet to ricochet off into the ravine. We did not hear it hit the bottom.

My wife cried, *"Aiuto!"* Then we were both screaming for help—the only time in my life I have done so. And on this I think the movies have got it about right: the yells, the excitement, the desperation. Two tiny figures far across the valley turned and saw us. Faintly, we picked up the word *"Aspettate!"*—"Wait!" We waited. We wondered if we would be obliged to pay for whatever help came. We realized that it was worth any price. More stones fell. We shivered as the light began to go. We did all the *Reader's Digest* true-story things: we thought of our children, reminisced, massaged each other's hands. Until, through the twilight, unbelievably sweet, there it was: the faintest drone, a helicopter. Suddenly, we were hugging like newlyweds.

They had known at once where to find us, the rescuers told us, because everybody died here. They'd brought body bags. Unable to winch us up, because of the overhang, they climbed down from above with ropes and pitons. Despite the absence of scarlet suits and white beards, I have never seen two more convincing Santa Clauses, or received a more welcome gift.

That evening, we made toasts; the next day I was shaking so much I couldn't type. But for someone else it would not be a merry Christmas. Just as the holiday began, I read in the local paper, "MOUNTAIN CATASTROPHE: FATHER OF THREE FALLS TO HIS DEATH." The father of three had followed in our tracks, only days later, our rescuers told us when we phoned, and had fallen from that very ledge. They had winched him out at 3 A.M. He was the same age I was at the time: forty-one. I felt, strangely, that I had been saved by substitution. Which is the basis of the Jesus story, after all. For Christmas, we bought ourselves a mobile phone and cancelled the family skiing holiday.

—TIM PARKS

at the temples, was pulled back like a ballerina's.

"You should have heard him in the car," Laxmi said. "He's already memorized all of Europe."

"It's not a game," Rohin said. "I'm having a competition with a boy at school. We're competing to memorize all the capitals. I'm going to beat him."

Miranda nodded. "O.K. What's the capital of India?"

"That's no good." He marched away, his arms swinging like a toy soldier's. Then he marched back to Laxmi's cousin and tugged at a pocket of her overcoat. "Ask me a hard one."

"Senegal," she said.

"Dakar!" Rohin exclaimed triumphantly, and began running in larger and larger circles. Eventually he ran into the kitchen. Miranda could hear him opening and closing the fridge.

"Rohin, don't touch without asking," Laxmi's cousin called out wearily. She managed a smile for Miranda. "Don't worry, he'll fall asleep in a few hours. And thanks for watching him."

Miranda fastened the chain on the door. Rohin was in the living room now, at the dining table, kneeling on one of the director's chairs. He unzipped his knapsack, pushed Miranda's basket of manicure supplies to one side of the table, and spread his crayons over the surface. Miranda stood over his shoulder. She watched as he gripped a blue crayon and drew the outline of an airplane.

"It's lovely," she said. When he didn't reply, she went to the kitchen to pour herself more coffee.

"Some for me, please," Rohin called out.

She returned to the living room. "Some what?"

"Some coffee. There's enough in the pot. I saw."

"You're too young for coffee."

Rohin leaned over the sketch pad, so that his tiny chest and shoulders almost touched it, his head tilted to one side. "The stewardess let me have coffee," he said. "She made it with milk and lots of sugar." He straightened, revealing a woman's face beside the plane, with long wavy hair and eyes like asterisks. "Her hair was more shiny," he decided, adding, "My father met a pretty woman on a plane, too." He looked at Miranda. His face darkened as he watched her drink. "Can't

I have just a little coffee? Please?"

She wondered, in spite of his composed, brooding expression, if he was the type of child to throw a tantrum. She imagined his kicking her with his leather shoes, screaming for coffee, screaming and crying until his mother and Laxmi came back to fetch him.

"Thank you," he said when Miranda put a mug on the table. He took short sips, holding the mug securely with both hands.

Miranda sat with him while he drew, but when she attempted to put a coat of clear polish on her nails he protested. Instead he pulled out a paperback world almanac from his knapsack and asked her to quiz him. The countries were arranged by continent, six to a page, with the capitals in boldface. Miranda turned to the middle of the African section and went down the list.

"Mali," she asked him.

"Bamako," he replied instantly.

"Malawi."

"Lilongwe."

She remembered looking at Africa in the Mapparium. She remembered that the fat part of it was green.

"Go on," Rohin said.

"Mauritania."

"Nouakchott."

"Mauritius."

He paused, squeezed his eyes shut, then opened them, defeated. "I can't remember."

"Port Louis," she told him.

"Port Louis." He began to say it again and again, like a chant, under his breath.

When they reached the last of the countries in Africa, Rohin said he wanted to watch cartoons with her. When they ended, he followed her to the kitchen, and stood by her side as she made more coffee. A few minutes later she went to the bathroom, and when she opened the door she was startled to find him standing outside.

"Do you need to go?"

He shook his head but walked into the bathroom anyway. He put the cover of the toilet down, climbed on top of it, and surveyed the narrow glass shelf over the sink that held Miranda's toothbrush and makeup.

"What's this for?" he asked, picking up the sample of eye gel she'd got the day she met Dev.

"Puffiness."

"What's puffiness?"

"Here," she explained, pointing.

"After you've been crying?"

"I guess so."

Rohin opened the tube and smelled it. He squeezed a drop of it onto a finger, then rubbed it on his hand. "It stings." He inspected the back of his hand closely, as if expecting it to change color. "My mother has puffiness. She says it's a cold, but really she cries, sometimes for hours. Sometimes straight through dinner. Sometimes she cries so hard her eyes puff up like bullfrogs."

Miranda wondered if she ought to feed him. In the kitchen she discovered a bag of rice cakes and some lettuce. She offered to go out, to buy something from the deli, but Rohin said he wasn't very hungry, and accepted one of the rice cakes. "You eat one, too," he said. They sat at the table, the rice cakes between them. He turned to a fresh page in his sketch pad. "You draw."

She selected a crayon. "What should I draw?"

He thought for a moment. "I know," he said. He asked her to draw things in the living room: the sofa, the director's chairs, the television, the telephone. "This way I can memorize it."

"Memorize what?"

"Our day together." He reached for another rice cake.

"Why do you want to memorize it?"

"Because we're never going to see each other, ever again."

The precision of the phrase startled her. He tapped the page. "Go on."

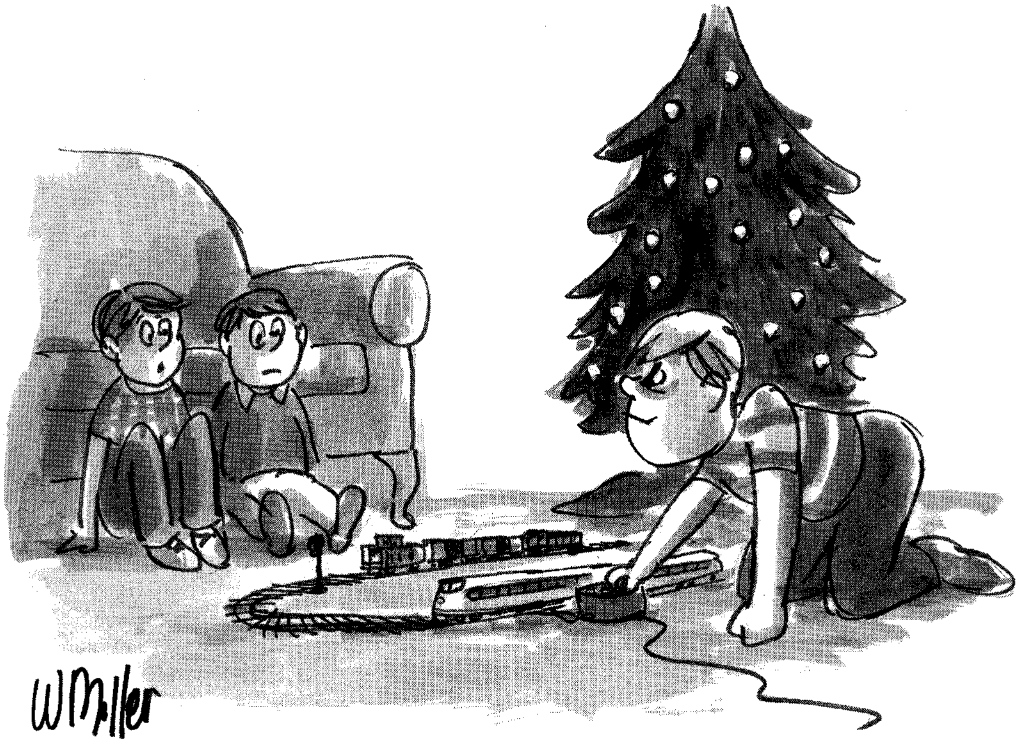
She drew as well as she could. He sidled up to her, so close that it was sometimes difficult to see what she was doing. He put his small brown hand over hers. "Now me."

When she hesitated, the brooding look began to spread across Rohin's face again, as it had when she'd refused him coffee. "Please?"

She drew his face, outlining his head and the thick fringe of hair. He sat perfectly still, with a formal, melancholy expression. Miranda wished she could draw a good likeness, but it looked nothing like him. She was in the middle of drawing his nose when he wriggled away from the table.

"I'm bored," he announced, heading toward her bedroom. She heard him opening the door, opening the drawers of her bureau and closing them.

When she joined him he was inside the closet. He emerged, his hair dishevelled, holding



"He certainly makes the trains run on time."

the silver cocktail dress. "This was on the floor."

"It falls off the hanger."

Rohin looked at the dress and then at Miranda's body. "Put it on."

"Excuse me?"

"Put it on."

There was no reason to put it on. Apart from in the fitting room at Filene's she had never worn it, and as long as she was with Dev she knew she never would. She took the dress from Rohin and shook it out, even though the slinky fabric never wrinkled. She reached into the closet for a free hanger.

"Please put it on," Rohin asked, suddenly standing behind her. He pressed his face against her, clasping her waist with both his thin arms. "Please?"

"All right," she said, surprised by the strength of his grip.

He smiled, satisfied, and sat on the edge of her bed.

"You have to wait out there," she said, pointing to the door. "I'll come out when I'm ready."

"But my mother always takes her clothes off in front of me."

"She does?"

Rohin nodded. "She doesn't even pick them up afterward. She leaves them all on the floor by the bed, all tangled.

"One day she slept in my room," he continued. "She said it felt better than her bed, now that my father's gone."

"I'm not your mother," Miranda said, lifting him by the armpits off her bed. When he refused to stand, she picked him up. He was heavier than she expected, and he clung to her, his legs wrapped firmly around her hips, his head resting against her chest. She set him down in the hallway and shut the door. She changed into the dress, glancing into the full-length mirror nailed to the back of the door. Her ankle socks looked silly, and so she opened a drawer and found the stockings. She searched through the closet and slipped on the high heels with the tiny buckles. The chain straps of the dress were as light as paper clips against her collarbone. It was a bit loose on her. She could not zip it herself.

Rohin began knocking. "May I come in now?"

She opened the door. He was holding his almanac in his hands, muttering something under his breath. His eyes opened wide at the sight of her. "I need help with the zipper," she said. She sat on the edge of the bed.

Rohin fastened the zipper to the top, and then Miranda stood up and twirled. He put down the almanac. "You're sexy," he declared.

"What did you say?"

"You're sexy."

Miranda sat down again. Though she knew it meant nothing, her heart skipped a beat. Rohin probably referred to all women as sexy. He'd probably heard the word on television, or seen it on the cover of a magazine.

Miranda folded her arms across her chest and looked Rohin in the eyes. "Tell me something."

He was silent.

"What does it mean?"

"What?"

"That word. 'Sexy.' What does it mean?"

He looked down, suddenly shy. "I can't tell you."

"Why not?"

"It's a secret." He pressed his lips together, so hard that a bit of them went white.

"Tell me the secret. I want to know."

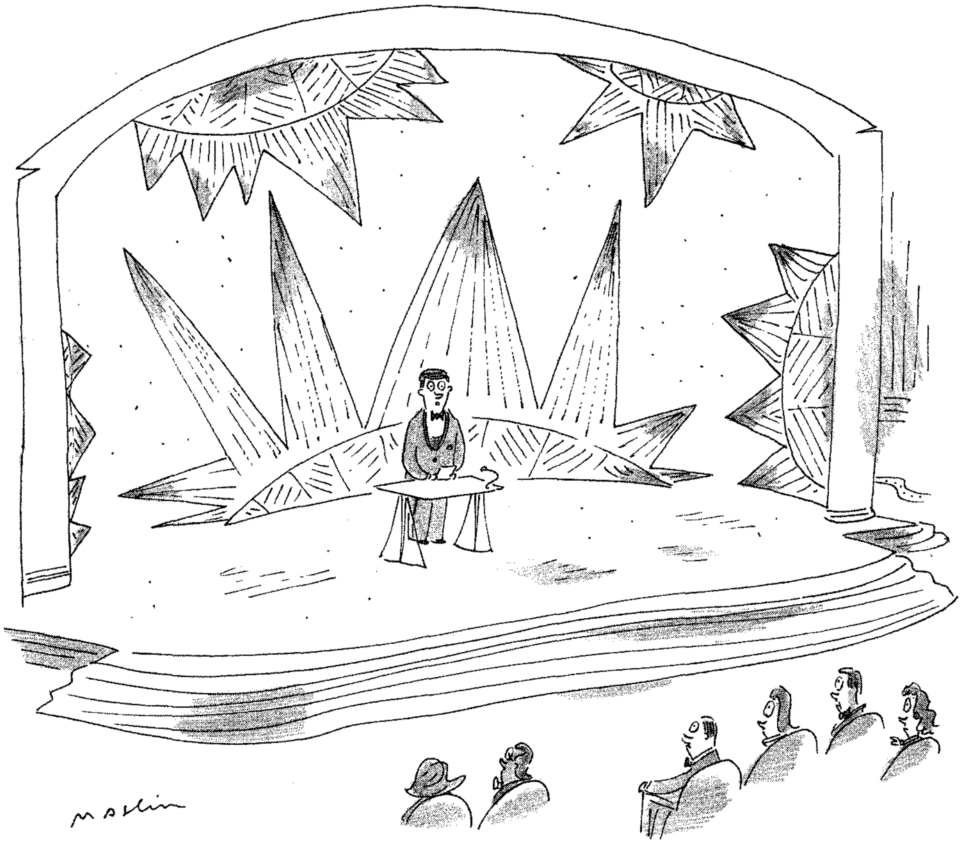
Rohin sat on the bed beside Miranda and began to kick the edge of the mattress with the backs of his shoes. He giggled nervously, his thin body flinching as if it were being tickled.

"Tell me," Miranda demanded. She leaned over and gripped his ankles, holding his feet still. He fell back on the bed, his back straight as a board. He cupped his hands around his mouth, and then he whispered, "It means loving someone you don't know."

Miranda felt Rohin's words under her skin, the same way she'd felt Dev's. But instead of going hot she felt numb. It reminded her of the way she'd felt when she understood, without even looking at a picture, that Madhuri Dixit, whom Dev's wife resembled, was beautiful.

"That's what my father did," Rohin continued. "He sat next to someone he didn't know, someone sexy, and now he loves her instead of my mother."

He took off his shoes and placed



"And now, the award for most chutzpah by an individual in a flock, or horde, of reporters."

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them side by side on the floor. Then he peeled back the comforter and crawled into Miranda's bed with the almanac. A minute later the book dropped from his hands, and he closed his eyes. Miranda watched him sleep, the comforter rising and falling as he breathed. He didn't wake up after twelve minutes, like Dev, or even twenty. He didn't open his eyes as she stepped out of the silver cocktail dress and back into her jeans, as she put the high-heeled shoes in the back of the closet and rolled up the stockings.

When she had put everything away she sat on the bed again. She leaned toward him, close enough to see some white powder from the rice cakes stuck to the corners of his mouth. She imagined the quarrels Rohin had overheard in his house in Montreal. "Is she pretty?" his mother would have asked his father, wearing the same bathrobe she'd worn for weeks, her own pretty face turning spiteful. "Is she sexy?" His father would deny it at first, try to change the subject. "Tell me," Rohin's mother would shriek, "tell me if she's sexy." In the end his father would admit that she was, and his mother would cry and cry, in a bed surrounded by a tangle of clothes, her eyes puffing up like bullfrogs. "How could you," she'd sob, "how could you love a woman you don't even know?"

As Miranda imagined the scene she began to cry a little herself. In the Mapparium that day, all the countries had seemed close enough to touch. From across the bridge, thirty feet away, Dev's words had reached her ears, so near and full of warmth that they'd drifted for days under her skin. Miranda cried harder. But Rohin still slept. She guessed that he was used to it now—to the sound of a woman crying.

On Sunday, Dev called to tell Miranda he was on his way. "I'm almost ready. I'll be there at two."

She was watching a cooking show on television. A woman pointed to a row of apples, explaining which were best for baking. "You shouldn't come today."

"Why not?"

"I have a cold," she lied. It wasn't far from the truth; tears had left her congested. "I've been in bed all morning."

"You do sound stuffed up." There

WINTER TALE

THE ROOM OUTSIDE

"RED PORT IN WINTER" BY OSCAR FLORIANUS BLUEMNER COURTESY RICHARD YORK GALLERY

The house on Ninth Street, where I lived as a child, had eleven-foot ceilings, and the downstairs rooms opened out of each other and were hard to heat. In late October, with the coal bill much on his mind, my father went from room to room downstairs stuffing toilet paper in the cracks between the windows and the window frames. Storm windows would have been better but they were unknown in our part of the country in the early decades of this century. There was a fireplace in the living room and another in the room we called the library, and when anyone tried to start a fire in either of them puffs of smoke would blow out into the room. The chimneys do not draw well when they are cold, and from the window seat in the library I watch as my father arranges paper and kindling properly between the andirons, and then the logs, and puts a match to the paper and stands holding an opened-out page of the Lincoln *Evening Courier* across the upper part of the opening and waits patiently for the air to start going up the chimney instead of out into the room. If I pull the curtain around me and look out into the winter night, I see the house next door, the fence that divides our yard from the neighbors', a tree trunk, sometimes the moon. If I let the curtain fall back what I see is a reflection of the room I am in, superimposed on what is really out there. When the newspaper catches on fire and vanishes up the flue (because it has now begun to draw properly), I see that, too, reflected in the windowpane.

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In the winter of 1931 I have taken the train from Boston to Providence to spend the day with Cletus Oakley and his wife. I am a graduate student at Harvard and he is teaching at Brown. When I was a freshman at the University of Illinois he made it impossible for me not to understand differential and integral calculus. Now, in his car, we drive to some place near Pomfret, Connecticut, where the snow lies across the countryside in deep drifts. He has brought snowshoes for the three of us. I have never had snowshoes on before and find it difficult to keep from stepping on my own feet. We talk as we walk and sometimes I trip and fall and Cletus helps me up. The sun is shining out of a cobalt-blue sky and the air is so dry that breathing is a pleasure. (Why did I never see them again when I liked them so much? How could I have been so stupid as to leave everything, including friendships, to chance?) When the light begins to fail, Cletus drives us to an eighteenth-century house, and there an old woman gives us tea and hot biscuits and honey. We are happy because of the fresh air and exercise, and she is happy because the spring garden catalogues have come.

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When I was in my middle twenties I spent a winter on a farm in southern Wisconsin. There it was much colder than it was in Illinois, where, with the wind coming down off Lake Michigan, God knows it is cold enough. Bales of hay were banked all around the foundations of the farmhouse, which was heated by two sheet-iron wood-burning stoves, one upstairs and one downstairs in the room next to my small bedroom. And, of course, the cookstove in the kitchen. In the morning when I woke I sometimes saw a broad band of yellow light in the sky that I have never seen anywhere else, and before I could wash my face I often had to break a thin glaze of ice in the water pitcher on my dresser. The window had to be propped open, by a wooden spool in ordinary weather, a smaller spool if the temperature was twenty below, and if it was colder than that I didn't open the window at all. It was up to me to see that the woodbox in the kitchen was never empty and fill the reservoir on the side of the stove. The air was usually so dry you could run out of the house in your shirtsleeves and fill a bucket of water at the pump but you couldn't touch the pump handle with your bare hands. I also had to keep a patch of ground bare and sprinkled with corn for the quail. If it rained when the temperature was hovering around thirty-two degrees their feathers froze and they couldn't fly into the shelter of the woods.

Eventually there was so much snow on the roads that the snowplow couldn't get through and we were snowbound. One evening after supper the telephone rang and it was a neighbor saying that the mailman had got as far as the Four Corners, where our mailbox was. I put on extra-heavy underwear and, bundled to the eyes in sweaters and woollen scarves, I started to ski to the Four Corners. The snowdrifts were higher than the horse-and-rider fences, obliterating the divisions between the fields, and I saw what nobody in the family and none of the neighboring farmers had ever seen: a pack of wild dogs running in a circle in the bright moonlight.

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My wife and I are planning to spend the first Christmas of our married life in Oregon with her mother and father. We have been living in a small, one-story house in northern Westchester County. It started to snow at dusk the evening before our departure and it has snowed all night. The view from the kitchen window is cribbed from John Greenleaf Whittier. The town snowplows have kept our road open and a taxi delivers us at Harmon station in plenty of time, but for the last hour no trains have come into or left the station. The ticket agent is noncommittal. We wait and wait, consult the station clock, count our luggage. Privately I entertain the possibility that we will spend this Christmas at home. At that moment, far down the tracks to the south, there is a light. "The Twentieth Century Limited to Chicago arriving on Track Four!" the ticket agent announces over the public-address system, and in no time at all we are in our snug compartment looking out at the snow falling on the Hudson River. We are off. We have got away. Upstate New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Indiana are like a long, uninterrupted, white thought. In Chicago the slush is ankle deep. Then we pick up the thought where we left off. It is winter all the way across the Great Plains and the Rocky Mountains, but in Portland there is no snow on the ground and the camellias are in bloom.

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Several families have lived in the house on Ninth Street since my father sold it and some of them loved it as much as I did. They also made changes. Out of kindness, people—sometimes acquaintances, sometimes strangers—send me snapshots of the exterior from the front or the side. Our trees have died of old age or the elm blight and been replaced by others, but why the shutters, and what in Heaven's name happened to the porch railing? Nothing is right that isn't the way I remember it, and I drop the snapshots in the wastebasket. That room outside, superimposed on the snow: the reflection of the lamp, the table and the chair where my mother likes to sit when she sews, the white bookcase, the Oriental rugs, the man standing at the fireplace and the little boy peering out at the night—that image that was nothing more than a trick of the window glass—is indestructible. —WILLIAM MAXWELL

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was a pause. "Do you need anything?"

"I'm all set."

"Drink lots of fluids."

"Dev?"

"Yes, Miranda?"

"Do you remember that day we went to the Mapparium?"

"Of course."

"Do you remember how we whispered to each other?"

"I remember," Dev whispered playfully.

"Do you remember what you said?"

There was a pause. "'Let's go back to your place.'" He laughed quietly. "Next Sunday, then?"

The day before, as she'd cried, Miranda had believed that she would never forget anything—not even the way her name looked written in Bengali. She'd fallen asleep beside Rohin, and when she woke he was drawing an airplane on the copy of *The Economist* she'd saved, hidden under the bed. "Who's Devajit Mitra?" he had asked, looking at the address label. Miranda pictured Dev in his sweatpants and sneakers, laughing into the phone. In a moment he'd join his wife downstairs, and tell her he wasn't going jogging. He'd pulled a muscle while stretching, he'd say, settling down to read the paper. In spite of herself, she longed for him. She would see him one more Sunday, she decided, perhaps two. Then she would tell him the things she had known all along: that it wasn't fair to his wife, or to her, that they both deserved better, that there was no point in it dragging on.

But the next Sunday it snowed, so much so that Dev couldn't tell his wife he was going running along the Charles. The Sunday after that, the snow had melted, but Miranda made plans to go to the movies with Laxmi, and when she told Dev this over the phone he didn't ask her to cancel them. The third Sunday she got up early and went out for a walk. It was cold, but sunny, and so she walked all the way down Commonwealth Avenue, past the restaurants where Dev had kissed her, and then she walked all the way to the Christian Science center. The Mapparium was closed, but she bought a cup of coffee nearby and sat on one of the benches in the plaza outside the church, gazing at its giant pillars and its massive dome, and at the clear-blue sky spread over the city. ♦

FICTION

SEA OAK

Where there's no sea and no oak.

BY GEORGE SAUNDERS

At ten Mr. Frendt comes on the P.A. and shouts, "Welcome to Joysticks!" Then he announces Shirts Off. We take off our flight jackets and fold them up. We take off our shirts and fold them up. Our scarves we leave on. Thomas Kirster's our beautiful boy. He's got long muscles and bright-blue eyes. The minute his shirt comes off two fat ladies hustle up the aisle and stick some money in his pants and ask will he be their Pilot. He says sure. He brings their salads. He brings their soup. My phone rings and the caller tells me to come see her in the Spitfire mockup. Does she want me to be her Pilot? I'm hoping. Inside the Spitfire is Margie, who says she's been diagnosed with Chronic Shyness Syndrome, then hands me an Instamatic and offers me ten bucks for a closeup of Thomas's tush.

Do I do it? Yes I do.

It could be worse. It is worse for Lloyd Betts. Lately he's put on weight and his hair's gone thin. He doesn't get a call all shift and waits zero tables and winds up sitting on the P-51 wing, playing solitaire in a hunched-over position that gives him big gut rolls.

I Pilot six tables and make thirty dollars in tips plus five an hour in salary.

After closing we sit on the floor for Debriefing. "There are times," Mr. Frendt says, "when one must move gracefully to the next station in life, like for example certain women in Africa or Brazil, I forget which, who either color their faces or don some kind of distinctive headdress upon achieving menopause. Are you with me? One of our ranks must now leave us. No one is an island in terms of being thought cute forever, and so today we must say goodbye to our friend Lloyd. Lloyd, stand up so we can say goodbye to you. I'm sorry. We are all so very sorry."

"Oh God," says Lloyd. "Let this not be true."

But it's true. Lloyd's finished. We give him a round of applause, and Mr. Frendt gives him a Farewell Pen and the contents of his locker in a trash bag and out he goes. Poor Lloyd. He's got a wife and two kids and a sad little duplex on Self-Storage Parkway.

"It's been a pleasure!" he shouts desperately from the doorway, trying not to burn any bridges.

What a stressful workplace. The minute your Cute Rating drops you're a goner. Guests rank us as Knockout, Honeypie, Adequate, or Stinker. Not that I'm complaining. At least I'm working. At least I'm not a Stinker like Lloyd.

I'm a solid Honeypie/Adequate, heading home with forty bucks cash.

At Sea Oak there's no sea and no oak, just a hundred subsidized apartments and a rear view of FedEx. Min and Jade are feeding their babies while watching "How My Child Died Violently." Min's my sister. Jade's our cousin. "How My Child Died Violently" is hosted by Matt Merton, a six-foot-five blond who's always giving the parents shoulder rubs and telling them they've been sainted by pain. Today's show features a ten-year-old who killed a five-year-old for refusing to join his gang. The ten-year-old strangled the five-year-old with a jump rope, filled his mouth with baseball cards, then locked himself in the bathroom and wouldn't come out until his parents agreed to take him to FunTimeZone. The audience is shrieking threats at the parents of the killer while the parents of the victim urge restraint and forgiveness to such an extent that finally the audience starts shrieking threats at them, too. Then it's a commercial. Min and Jade put down the babies and light cigarettes and pace the room while quizzing each other for their G.E.D.s. It doesn't look good. Jade says "regicide" is a virus. Min locates Biafra one planet from Saturn. I offer to help and they start yelling at me for condescending.

"You're lucky, man!" my sister says. "You did high school. You got your frigging diploma. We don't. That's why we have to do this G.E.D. shit. If we had our diplomas we could just watch TV and not be all distracted."

"Really," says Jade. "Now shut it, chick! We got to study. Show's almost on."

They debate how many sides a triangle has. They agree that Churchill was in opera. Matt Merton comes back and explains that last week's show on suicide, in which the parents watched a reenactment of their son's suicide, was a healing process for the parents, then shows a video of the parents admitting it was a healing process.

My sister's baby is Troy. Jade's baby is Mac. They crawl off into the kitchen and Troy gets his finger caught in the heat vent. Min rushes over and starts pulling.

"Jesus freaking Christ!" screams Jade. "Watch it! Stop yanking on him and get the freaking Vaseline. You're going to give him a really long arm, man!"

Troy starts crying. Mac starts crying. I go over and free Troy no problem. Meanwhile Jade and Min get in a slap fight and nearly knock over the TV.

"Yo, chick!" Min shouts at the top of her lungs. "I'm sure you're slapping me? And then you knock over the freaking TV? Don't you care?"

"I care!" Jade shouts back. "You're the slut who nearly pulled off her own kid's finger for no freaking reason, man!"

Just then Aunt Bernie comes in from DrugTown in her DrugTown cap and hobbles over and picks up Troy and everything calms way down.

"No need to fuss, little man," she says. "Everything's fine. Everything's just hunky-dory."

"Hunky-dory," says Min, and gives Jade one last pinch.

Aunt Bernie's a peacemaker. She

Father Brian says he's sorry to bother us so late, but something strange has happened. Something bad. Photograph by Carla Williams.

doesn't like trouble. Once this guy backed over her foot at FoodKing and she walked home with ten broken bones. She never got married, because Grandpa needed her to keep house after Grandma died. Then he died and left all his money to a woman none of us had ever heard of, and Aunt Bernie started in at DrugTown. But she's not bitter. Sometimes she's so non-bitter it gets on my nerves. When I say Sea Oak's a pit she says she's just glad to have a roof over her head. When I say I'm tired of being broke she says Grandpa once gave her pencils for Christmas and she was so thrilled she sat around sketching horses all day on the backs of used envelopes. Once I asked was she sorry she never had kids and she said no, not at all, and besides, weren't we her kids?

And I said yes we were.

But of course we're not.

For dinner it's beanie-wienies. For dessert it's ice cream with freezer burn.

"What a nice day we've had," Aunt Bernie says once we've got the babies in bed.

"Man, what an optometrist," says Jade.

NEXT day is Thursday, which means a visit from Ed Anders, from the Board of Health. He's in charge of insuring that our penises never show. Also that we don't kiss anyone. None of us ever kisses anyone or shows his penis except Sonny Vance, who does both, because he's saving up to buy a FaxIt franchise. As for our Penile Simulators, yes, we can show them, we can let them stick out the top of our pants, we can even periodically dampen our tight pants with spray bottles so our Simulators really contour, but our real penises, no, those have to stay inside our hot uncomfortable oversized Simulators.

"Sorry fellas, hi fellas," Anders says as he comes wearily in. "Please know that I don't like this any better than you do. I went to school to learn how to inspect meat, but this certainly wasn't what I had in mind. Ha ha!"

He orders a Lindbergh Enchilada and eats it cautiously, as if it's alive and he's afraid of waking it. Sonny Vance is serving soup to a table of hair stylists on a bender when, for a twenty, he shoots them a quick look at his unit.

Just then Anders glances up from his Lindbergh.

"Oh for crying out loud," he says, and writes up a Shutdown and we all get sent home early. Which is bad. Every cent counts. Lately I've been sneaking toilet paper home in my briefcase. I can fit three rolls in. By the time I get home they're usually flat and don't work so great on the roller but still it saves a few bucks.

I clock out and cut through the strip of forest behind FedEx. Very pretty. A raccoon scurries over a fallen oak and starts nibbling at a rusty bike. As I come out of the woods I hear a shot. At least I think it's a shot. It could be a backfire. But no, it's a shot, because then there's another one, and some kids sprint across the courtyard yelling that Big Scary Dawgz rule.

I run home. Min and Jade and Aunt Bernie and the babies are huddled behind the couch. Apparently they had the babies outside when the shooting started. Troy's walker got hit. Luckily, he wasn't in it. It's supposed to look like a duck but now the beak's missing.

"Man, fuck this shit!" Min shouts.

"Freak this crap, you mean," says Jade. "You want the babies growing up with shit-mouths like us? Crap-mouths, I mean?"

"I just want them growing up, period," says Min.

"Boo-hoo, Miss Dramatic," says Jade.

"Fuck off, Miss Ho," shouts Min.

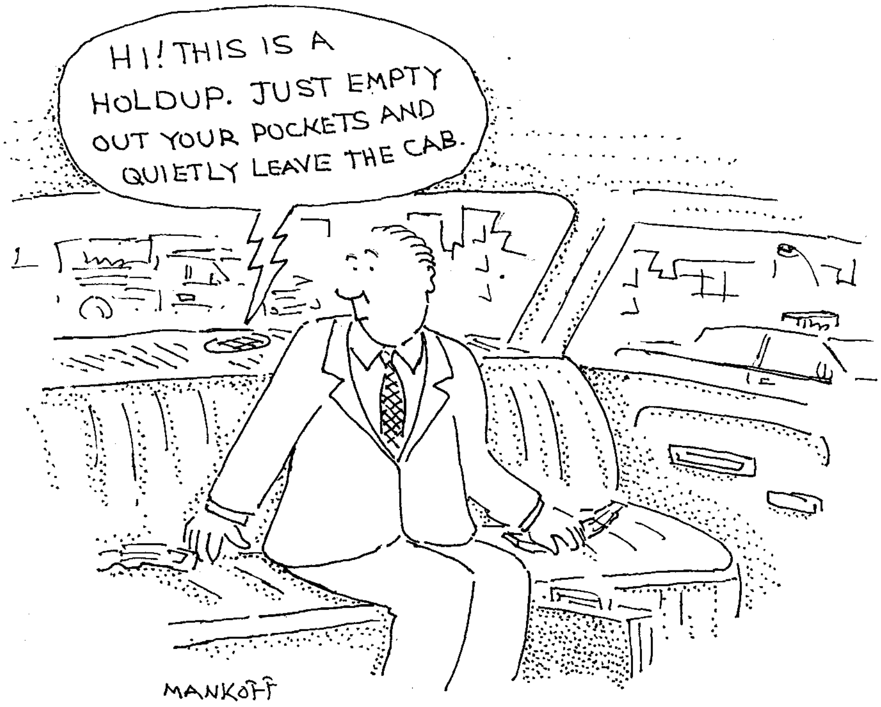
"I mean it, jagoff, I'm not kidding," shouts Jade and punches Min in the arm.

"Girls, for crying out loud!" says Aunt Bernie. "We should be thankful. At least we got a home. And at least none of them bullets actually hit nobody."

"No offense, Bernie?" says Min. "But you call this a freaking home?"

Sea Oak's not safe. There's an ad-hoc crackhouse in the laundry room and last week Min found some brass knuckles in the kiddie pool. If I had my way I'd move everybody up to Canada. It's nice there. Very polite. We went for a weekend last fall and got a flat tire and these two farmers with bright-red faces insisted on fixing it, then springing for dinner, then starting a college fund for the babies. They sent us the stock certificates a week later, along with a photo of all of us eating cobbler at a diner. But moving to Canada takes bucks. Dad's dead and left us nada and Ma now lives with Freddie, who doesn't like us, plus he's not exactly rich himself. He does phone polls. This month he's asking divorced women how often they backslide and sleep with their exes. He gets ten bucks for every completed poll.

So not lucrative, and Canada's a moot point.


HI! THIS IS A HOLDUP. JUST EMPTY OUT YOUR POCKETS AND QUIETLY LEAVE THE CAB.
MANKOFF

I find the beak of Troy's duck and fix it with Elmer's.

"Actually, you know what?" says Aunt Bernie. "I think that looks even more like a real duck now. Because sometimes their beaks are cracked? I seen one like that downtown."

"Oh my God," says Min. "The kid's duck gets shot in the face and she says we're lucky."

"Well, we are lucky," says Bernie.

"Somebody's beak is cracked," says Jade.

"You know what I do if something bad happens?" Bernie says. "I don't think about it. Don't take it so serious. It ain't the end of the world. That's what I do. That's what I always done. That's how I got where I am."

My feeling is, Bernie, I love you, but where are you? You work at DrugTown for minimum. You're sixty and own nothing. You were basically a slave to your father and never had a date in your life.

"I mean, complain if you want," she says. "But I think we're doing pretty darn good for ourselves."

"Oh, we're doing great," says Min, and pulls Troy out from behind the couch and brushes some duck shards off his sleeper.

JOYSTICKS reopens on Friday. It's a madhouse. They've got the fog on. A bridge club offers me fifteen bucks to oil-wrestle Mel Turner. So I oil-wrestle Mel Turner. They offer me twenty bucks to feed them chicken wings from my hand. So I feed them chicken wings from my hand. The afternoon flies by. Then the evening. At nine the bridge club leaves and I get a sorority. They sing intelligent nasty songs and grope my Simulator and say they'll never be able to look their boyfriends' meagre genitalia in the eye again. Then Mr. Frendt comes over and says phone. It's Min. She sounds crazy. Four times in a row she shrieks get home. When I tell her calm down, she hangs up. I call back and no one answers. No biggie. Min's prone to panic. Probably one of the babies is puky. Luckily I'm on FlexTime.

"I'll be back," I say to Mr. Frendt.

"I look forward to it," he says.

I jog across the marsh and through FedEx. Up on the hill there's a light from the last remaining farm. Sometimes we take the boys to the adjacent car wash to look at the cow. Tonight, however, the cow is elsewhere.

At home Min and Jade are hopping up and down in front of Aunt Bernie, who's sitting very very still at one end of the couch.

"Keep the babies out!" shrieks Min. "I don't want them seeing something dead!"

"Shut up, man!" shrieks Jade. "Don't call her something dead!"

She squats down and pinches Aunt Bernie's cheek.

"Aunt Bernie?" she shrieks. "Fuck!"

"We already tried that like twice, chick!" shrieks Min. "Why are you doing that shit again? Touch her neck and see if you can feel that beating thing!"

"Shit, shit, shit!" shrieks Jade.

I call 911 and the paramedics come out and work hard for twenty minutes, then give up and say they're sorry and it looks like she's been dead most of the afternoon. The apartment's a mess. Her money drawer's empty and her family photos are in the bathtub.

"Not a mark on her," says one cop.

"I suspect she died of fright," says another. "Fright of the intruder?"

"My guess is yes," says a paramedic.

"Oh God," says Jade. "God, God, God."

I sit down beside Aunt Bernie. I think: I am so sorry. I'm sorry I wasn't here when it happened and sorry you never had any fun in your life and sorry I wasn't rich enough to move you somewhere safe. I remember when she was young and wore pink stretch pants and made us paper chains out of DrugTown receipts while singing "Froggie Went A-Courting." All her life she worked hard. She never hurt anybody. And now this.

Scared to death in a crappy apartment.

Min puts the babies in the kitchen but they keep crawling out. Aunt Bernie's in a shroud on this sort of dolly and on the couch are a bunch of forms to sign.

We call Ma and Freddie. We get their machine.

"Ma, pick up!" says Min. "Something bad happened! Ma, please freaking pick up!"

But nobody picks up.

So we leave a message.

LOBTON'S FUNERAL PARLOR is just a regular house on a regular street. Inside there's a rack of brochures with titles like "Why Does My Loved One Appear Somewhat Larger?" Lobton looks healthy. Maybe too healthy. He's wearing a yellow golf shirt and his biceps keep involuntarily flexing. Every now and then he touches his delts as if to confirm they're still big as softballs.

"Such a sad thing," he says.

"How much?" asks Jade. "I mean, like for basic. Not super-fancy."

"But not crappy either," says Min. "Our aunt was the best."

"What price range were you considering?" says Lobton, cracking his knuckles. We tell him and his eyebrows go up and he leads us to something that looks like a moving box.

"Prior to usage we'll moisture-proof this with a spray lacquer," he says. "Makes it look quite woodlike."

"That's all we can get?" says Jade. "Cardboard?"

"I'm actually offering you a slight break already," he says, and does a kind of pushup against the wall. "On account of the tragic circumstances. This is Sierra Sunset. Not exactly cardboard. More of a fibreboard."

"I don't know," says Min. "Seems pretty gyppy."

"Can we think about it?" says Ma.

"Absolutely," says Lobton. "Last time I checked this was still America."

I step over and take a closer look. There are staples where Aunt Bernie's spine would be. Down at the foot there's some writing about folding Tab A into Slot B.

"No freaking way," says Jade. "Work your whole life and end up in a Mayflower box? I doubt it."

We've got zip in savings. We sit at a desk and Lobton does what he calls a Credit Calc. If we pay it out monthly for seven years we can afford the AmberMist, which includes a double-thick balsa box and two coats of lacquer and a one-hour wake.

"But seven years, jeez," says Jade.

"We got to get her the good one,"

says Min. "She never had anything nice in her life."

So AmberMist it is.

We bury her at St. Leo's, on the hill up near BastCo. Her part of the graveyard's pretty plain. No angels, no little rock houses, no flowers, just a bunch of flat stones like parking bumpers and here and there a Styrofoam cup. Father Brian says a prayer and then one of us is supposed to talk. But what's there to say? She never had a life. Never married, no kids, work, work, work. Did she ever go on a cruise? All her life it was buses. Buses, buses, buses. Once she went with Ma on a bus to Quigley, Kansas, to gamble and shop at an outlet mall. Someone broke into her room and stole her clothes and took a dump in her suitcase while they were at the Roy Clark show. That was it. That was the extent of her tourism. After that it was DrugTown, night and day. After fifteen years as Cashier she got demoted to Greeter. People would ask where the Cold Remedies were and she'd point to some big letters on the wall that said Cold Remedies.

Freddie, Ma's boyfriend, steps up and says he didn't know her very long but she was an awful nice lady and left behind a lot of love, etc., etc., blah blah blah. While it's true she didn't do much in her life, still she was very dear to those of us who knew her and never made a stink about anything but was always content with whatever happened to her, etc., etc., blah blah blah.

Then it's over and we're supposed to go away.

"We gotta come out here like every week," says Jade.

"I know I will," says Min.

"What, like I won't?" says Jade. "She was so freaking nice."

"I'm sure you swear at a grave," says Min.

"Since when is freak a swear, chick?" says Jade.

"Girls," says Ma.

"I hope I did O.K. in what I said about her," says Freddie in his full-of-crap way, smelling bad of English Navy. "Actually I sort of surprised myself."

"Bye-bye, Aunt Bernie," says Min.

"Bye-bye, Bern," says Jade.

"Oh my dear sister," says Ma.

I scrunch my eyes tight and try to picture her happy, laughing, poking me in the ribs. But all I can see is her terrified on the couch. It's awful. Out there, somewhere, is whoever did it. Someone came in our house, scared her to death, watched her die, went through our stuff, stole her money. Someone who's still living, someone who right now might be having a piece of pie or running an errand or scratching his ass, someone who, if he wanted to, could drive west for three days or whatever and sit in the sun by the ocean.

We stand a few minutes with heads down and hands folded.

Afterward Freddie takes us to Trabanti's for lunch. Last year Trabanti died and three Vietnamese families went in together and bought the place, and it still serves pasta and pizza and the big oil of Trabanti is still on the wall but now from the kitchen comes this very pretty Vietnamese music and the food is somehow better.

Freddie proposes a toast. Min says remember how Bernie always called lunch dinner and dinner supper? Jade says remember how when her jaw clicked she'd say she needed oil?

"She was a excellent lady," says Freddie.

"I already miss her so bad," says Ma.

"I'd like to kill that fuck that killed her," says Min.

"How about let's don't say fuck at lunch," says Ma.

"It's just a word, Ma, right?" says Min. "Like pluck is just a word? You don't mind if I say pluck? Pluck, pluck, pluck?"

"Well, shit's just a word, too," says Freddie. "But we don't say it at lunch."

"Same with puke," says Ma.

"Shit puke, shit puke," says Min.

The waiter clears his throat. Ma glares at Min.

"I love you girls' manners," Ma says.

"Especially at a funeral," says Freddie.

"This ain't a funeral," says Min.

"The question in my mind is what you kids are gonna do now," says Freddie. "Because I consider this whole thing a wakeup call, meaning it's time for you to pull yourselfs up by the bootstraps like I done and get out of that dangerous craphole you're living at."

"Mister Phone Poll speaks," says Min.

"Anyways it ain't that dangerous," says Jade.

"A woman gets killed and it ain't that dangerous?" says Freddie.

"All's we need is a dead bolt and a eyehole," says Min.

"What's a bootstrap?" says Jade.

"It's like a strap on a boot, you doof," says Min.

"Plus where we gonna go?" says Min. "Can we move in with you guys?"

"I personally would love that, and you know that," says Freddie. "But who would not love that is our landlord."

"I think what Freddie's saying is it's time for you girls to get jobs," says Ma.

"Yeah right, Ma," says Min. "After what happened last time?"

When I first moved in, Jade and Min were working the Info booth at HardwareNiche. Then one day we picked the babies up at day care and found Troy sitting naked on top of the washer and Mac in the yard being nipped by a Pekingese and the day-care lady sloshed and playing KillerBirds on Nintendo.

So that was that. No more HardwareNiche.

"Maybe one could work, one could babysit?" says Ma.

"I don't see why I should have to work so she can stay home with her baby," says Min.

"And I don't see why I should have to work so she can stay home with her baby," says Jade.

"It's like a freaking veece versa," says Min.

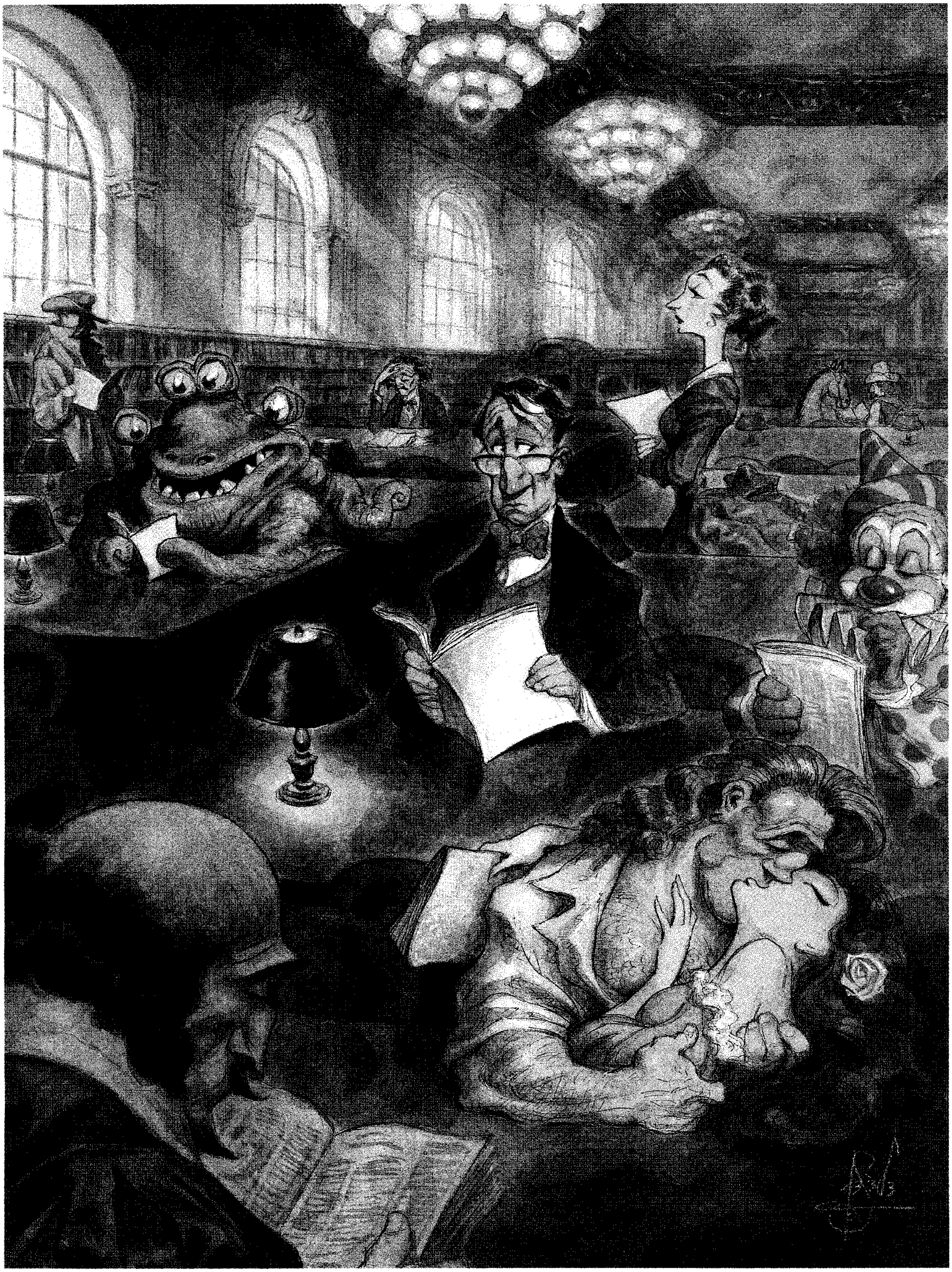
"Let me tell you something," says Freddie. "Something about this country. Anybody can do anything. But first they gotta try. And you guys ain't. Two don't work and one strips naked? I don't consider that trying. You kids make squat. And therefore you live in a dangerous craphole. And what happens in a dangerous craphole? Bad tragic shit. It's the freaking American way—you start out in a dangerous craphole and work hard so you can someday move up to a somewhat less dangerous craphole. And finally maybe you get a mansion. But at this rate you ain't even gonna make it to the somewhat less dangerous craphole."

"Like you live in a mansion," says Jade.

"I do not claim to live in no mansion," says Freddie. "But then again I do

SKETCHBOOK BY PETER DE SÈVE

IN THE READING ROOM



not live in no slum. The other thing I also do not do is strip naked."

"Thank God for small favors," says Min.

"Anyways he's never actually naked," says Jade.

Which is true. I always have on at least a T-back.

"No wonder we never take these kids out to a nice lunch," says Freddie.

"I do not even consider this a nice lunch," says Min.

FOR dinner Jade microwaves some Stars-n-Flags. They're addictive. They put sugar in the sauce and sugar in the meat nuggets. I think also caffeine. Someone told me the brown streaks in the Flags are caffeine. We have like five bowls each.

After dinner the babies get fussy and Min puts a mush of ice cream and Hershey's syrup in their bottles and we watch "The Worst That Could Happen," a half hour of computer simulations of tragedies that have never actually occurred but theoretically could. A kid gets hit by a train and flies into a zoo, where he's eaten by wolves. A man cuts his hand off chopping wood and while wandering around screaming for help is picked up by a tornado and dropped on a preschool during recess and lands on a pregnant teacher.

"I miss Bernie so bad," says Min.

"Me too," says Jade sadly.

The babies start howling for more ice cream.

"That is so cute," says Jade. "They're like, *Give it the fuck up!*"

"We'll give it the fuck up, sweeties, don't worry," says Min. "We didn't forget about you."

Then the phone rings. It's Father Brian. He sounds weird. He says he's sorry to bother us so late. But something strange has happened. Something bad. Something sort of, you know, unspeakable. Am I sitting? I'm not, but I say I am.

Apparently someone has defaced Bernie's grave.

My first thought is there's no stone. It's just grass. How do you deface grass? What did they do, pee on the grass on the grave? But Father's nearly in tears.

So I call Ma and Freddie and tell them to meet us, and we get the babies up and load them into the K-car.

"Deface," says Jade on the way over. "What does that mean, deface?"

WINTER TALE

LEAF-PEEPERS

GEORGE BATES

WHEN I was a kid, there was only one real tourist season in Maine: the three months between Memorial Day and Labor Day. But in recent years the tourists have been reappearing a month or so later, as leaf-peepers. In October, their cars (most seem to be Volvos) fill the back roads between Kittery and Fort Kent, moving slowly, weaving back and forth across the center line as the drivers gawk out their windows, looking for that leaf-peeper El Dorado known as "peak color." You also see their cars in New Hampshire, parked bumper to bumper along the breakdown lane as the owners train their Nikons down the gorges and ravines and frantically burn film, as well as farther west, in Vermont, where there's a cider stand around every bend and folks from Wisconsin hobnob with folks from Illinois about where the color is best (they agree that it's always north of where they are). But by late October—as the leaves start to dull and the trees show their branches (leaf-peepers don't come for branches)—they've gone home to eat their Thanksgiving dinners and Think Snow, as their bumper stickers say, only to return after New Year's Day, no longer summer people or leaf-peepers but ski bums, with roof racks mounted on their all-wheel drives.

Between the leaf-peepers' going and the skiers' coming, there is a hiatus which has taken me fifty years to appreciate. The weather is quiet. The back roads empty out, and the vehicles are different: they are pulp trucks, panel trucks, pick-'em-ups (usually jammed with wide-bodied fellows in orange down vests), and old cancerous Buicks. In the general stores of towns like Lovell and Sanborton, the talk relaxes, becomes less stagey. One hears less "ayuh" and "Coss we will."

The season tilts. Everything creaks. One can hear it—the sound is the bony skitter of small animals moving through the trees, doing the last of their pre-winter shopping. In these weeks, the woods give up their secrets. A squirrel moves with indiscreet fanfare through the fallen leaves, and you can also see it; there is no concealing greenery except for austere pines and spruces. It's possible that you'll spot a deer (or a moose) moving among the freshly opened lanes of the forest: before the first real snowfall, they're stuffed full with all the forage they can gobble, and look like a child's drawing, their squarish bodies somehow unlikely above their long, spindly legs.

Our house in western Maine juts out of a steep slope above a long finger of lake that in the summer we never see (there are winks of blue amid the trees in the late afternoon) and which late in the winter we see only as a flat, uninteresting expanse of snow. But in December the lake is suddenly there, all of it, a flinty arrowhead under what is usually a sunless gray sky. With no dazzle to distract the eye, one sees the water in a single, effortless north-south sweep. There is a grimness to this sort of landscape, but also a thin-lips-and-no-makeup beauty. After the leaves fall, geography tells its tale with great simplicity. The drifts of fallen leaves can't obscure the thinness of the soil: rocks break free everywhere, and hillsides become graveyards full of tumbled, unlettered tombstones. In the occasional sunlight, almost all shadows fall straight.

Romantics compare the cycle of the seasons to the cycle of human life, a comparison I have never really trusted. And yet now, at the age of fifty-one, I find something in it, after all. Sooner or later, life takes in its breath, pauses, and then tilts toward winter. I sense that tilt approaching. When the idea threatens to become oppressive, I think of the woods in New England tilting into winter—how you can see the whole expanse of the lake, not just the occasional wink through the trees, and hear every movement on the land that slopes down to the water. You can hear every living thing, no matter how cunning, before snow comes to muffle the world.

—STEPHEN KING

"It means like fucked it up," says Min.

"But how?" says Jade. "I mean, like what did they do?"

"We don't know, dumbass," says Min. "That's why we're going there."

"And why?" says Jade. "Why would someone do that?"

"Check out Miss Shreelock Holmes," says Min. "Someone done that because someone is a asshole."

"Someone is a big-time asshole," says Jade.

Father Brian meets us at the gate with a flashlight and a golf cart.

"When I saw this," he says, "I literally sat down in astonishment. Nothing like this has ever happened here. I am so sorry. You seem like nice people."

We're too heavy and the wheels spin as we climb the hills, so I get out and jog alongside.

"O.K., folks, brace yourselves," Father says, and shuts off the engine.

Where the grave used to be is just a hole. Inside the hole is the AmberMist, with the top missing. Inside the AmberMist is nothing. No Aunt Bernie.

"What the hell," says Jade. "Where's Bernie?"

"Somebody stole Bernie?" says Min.

"At least you folks have retained your feet," says Father Brian. "I'm telling you I literally sat right down. I sat right down on that pile of dirt. I dropped as if shot. See that mark? That's where I sat."

On the pile of grave dirt is a butt-shaped mark.

The cops show up and one climbs down in the hole with a tape measure and a camera. After three or four flashes he climbs out and hands Ma a pair of blue pumps.

"Her little shoes," says Ma. "Oh my God."

"Are those them?" says Jade.

"Those are them," says Min.

"I am freaking out," says Jade.

"I am totally freaking out," says Min.

"I'm gonna sit," says Ma, and drops into the golf cart.

"What I don't get is who'd want her?" says Min.

"She was just this lady," says Jade.

"Typically it's teens?" the cop says. "Typically we find the loved one nearby? Once we found the loved one nearby with, you know, a cigarette between its lips, wearing a sombrero? These kids today got a lot more nerve than we ever did. I never would've dreamed of digging up a dead corpse when I was a teen. You might tip over a stone, sure, you might spray-paint something on a crypt, you might, you know, give a wino a hotfoot."

"But this, jeez," says Freddie. "This is a entirely different ballgame."

"Boy howdy," says the cop, and we all look down at the shoes in Ma's hands.

NEXT day I go back to work. I don't feel like it, but we need the money. The grass is wet and it's hard getting across the ravine in my dress shoes. The soles are slick. Plus they're too tight. Several times I fall forward on my briefcase. Inside the briefcase are my T-backs and a thing of mousse.

Right off the bat I get a call from a tableful of MediBen women seated under a banner that says "BEST OF LUCK, BEATRICE, NO HARD FEELINGS." I take off my shirt and serve their salads. I take off my flight pants and serve their soup. One drops a dollar on the floor and tells me feel free to pick it up.

I pick it up.

"Not like that, not like that," she says. "Face the other way, so when you bend we can see your crack."

I've done this about a million times, but somehow I can't do it now.

I look at her. She looks at me.

"What?" she says. "I'm not allowed to say that? I thought that was the whole point."

"That is the whole point, Phyllis," says another lady. "You stand your ground."

"Look," Phyllis says. "Either bend how I say or give back the dollar. I think that's fair."

"You go, girl," says her friend.

I give back the dollar. I return to the Locker Area and sit awhile. For the first time ever, I'm voted Stinker. There are thirteen women at the MediBen table and they all vote me Stinker. Do the MediBen women know my situation? Would they vote me Stinker if they did? But what am I supposed to do, go out and say, please, ladies, my aunt just died, plus her body's missing?

Mr. Frendt pulls me aside.

"Perhaps you need to go home," he says. "I'm sorry for your loss. But I'd like to encourage you not to behave like one of those Comanche ladies who bite off their index fingers when a loved one dies. Grief is good, grief is fine, but too much grief, as we all know, is excessive. If your aunt's death has filled your mouth with too many bitten-off fingers, for crying out loud, take a week off, only don't take it out on our guests, they didn't kill your dang aunt."

But I can't afford to take a week off. I can't even afford to take a few days off.

"We really need the money," I say.

"Is that my problem?" he says. "Am I supposed to let you dance without vigor just because you need the money? Why don't I put an ad in the paper for all sad people who need money? All the town's sad could come here and strip. Goodbye. Come back when you feel halfway normal."

From the pay phone I call home to see if they need anything from the FoodSoQuik.

"Just come home," Min says stiffly. "Just come straight home."

"What is it?" I say.

"Come home," she says.

Maybe someone's found the body. I imagine Bernie naked, Bernie chopped in two, Bernie posed on a bus bench. I hope and pray that something only mildly bad's been done to her, something we can live with.

At home the door's wide open. Min and Jade are sitting very still on the couch, babies in their laps, staring at the rocking chair, and in the rocking chair is Bernie. Bernie's body. Same perm, same glasses, same blue dress we buried her in.

What's it doing here? Who could be so cruel? And what are we supposed to do with it?

Then she turns her head and looks at me.

"Sit the fuck down," she says.

In life she never swore.

I sit. Min squeezes and releases my hand, squeezes and releases, squeezes and releases.

"You, mister," Bernie says to me, "are going to start showing your cock. You'll show it and show it. You go up to a lady, if she wants to see it, if she'll pay to see it, I'll make a thumbprint on the forehead. You see the thumbprint, you ask. I'll try to get you five a day, at twenty bucks a pop. So a hundred bucks a day. Seven hundred a week. And that's cash, so no taxes. No withholding. See? That's the beauty of it."

She's got dirt in her hair and dirt in her teeth and her hair is a mess and her tongue when it darts out to lick her lips is black.

"You, Jade," she says. "Tomorrow you start work. Andersen Labels, Fifth and Rivera. Dress up when you go. Wear something nice. Show a little leg. And don't chomp your gum. Ask for Len. At the end of the month, we take the money you made and the cock money and get a new place. Somewhere safe. That's part one of Phase One. You, Min. You babysit. Plus you quit smoking. Plus you learn how to cook. No more food out of cans. We gotta eat right to look our best. Because I am getting me so many lovers. Maybe you kids don't know this but I died a freaking virgin. No babies, no lovers. Nothing went in, nothing came out. Ha ha! Dry as a bone, completely wasted, this pretty little thing God gave me between my legs. Well, I am going to have lovers now, you fucks! Like in the movies, big shoulders and all, and a summer house, and nice trips, and in the morning in my room a big vase of flowers, and I'm going to get my nipples hard standing in the breeze from the ocean, eating shrimp from a cup, you sons of bitches, while my lover watches me from the veranda, his big shoulders shining, all hard for me, that's one damn thing I will guarantee you kids! Ha ha! You think I'm joking? I ain't freaking joking. I never got nothing! My life was shit! I was never even up in a freaking plane. But that was that life and this is this life. My new life. Cover me up now! With a blanket. I need my beauty rest. Tell anyone I'm here, you all die. Plus they die. Whoever you tell, they die. I kill them with my mind. I can do that. I am very freaking strong now. I got powers! So no visitors. I don't exactly look my best. You got it? You all got it?"

We nod. I go for a blanket. Her hands and feet are shaking and she's grinding her teeth and one falls out.

"Put it over me, you fuck, all the way over!" she screams, and I put it over her.

We sneak off and whisper in the kitchen.

"It looks like her," says Min.

"It is her," I say.

"It is and it ain't," says Jade.

"We better do what she says," Min says.

"No shit," Jade says.

All night she sits in the rocker under the blanket, shaking and swearing.

All night we sit in Min's bed, fully dressed, holding hands.

"See how strong I am!" she shouts around midnight, and there's a cracking sound, and when I go out the door's been torn off the microwave but she's still sitting in the chair.

In the morning she's still there, shaking and swearing.

"Take the blanket off!" she screams. "It's time to get this show on the road."

I take the blanket off. The smell is not good. One ear is now in her lap. She keeps absent-mindedly sticking it back on her head.

"You, Jade!" she shouts. "Get dressed. Go get that job. When you meet Len, bend forward a little. Let him see down your top. Give him some hope. He's a sicko, but we need him. You, Min! Make breakfast. Something homemade. Like biscuits."

"Why don't you make it with your powers?" says Min.

"Don't be a smartass!" screams Bernie. "You see what I did to that microwave?"

"I don't know how to make freaking biscuits," Min wails.

"You know how to read, right?" Bernie shouts. "You ever heard of a recipe? You ever been in the grave? It sucks so bad! You regret all the things you never did. You little bitches are gonna have a very bad time in the grave unless you get on the stick, believe me! Turn down the thermostat! Make it cold. I like cold. Something's off with my body. I don't feel right."

I turn down the thermostat. She looks at me.

"Go show your cock!" she shouts. "That is the first part of Phase One. After we get the new place, then that's the end of the first part of Phase Two. You'll still show your cock, but only three days a week. Because you'll start community college. Pre-law. Pre-law is best. You'll be a whiz. You ain't dumb. And Jade'll work weekends to make up for the decrease in cock money. See? See how that works? Now get out of here. What are you gonna do?"

"Show my cock?" I say.

"Another round?"

• •

"Show your cock, that's right," she says, and brushes back her hair with her hand, and a huge wad comes out, leaving her almost bald on one side.

"Oh God," says Min. "You know what? No way me and the babies are staying here alone."

"You ain't alone," says Bernie. "I'm here."

"Please don't go," Min says to me.

"Oh, stop it," Bernie says, and the door flies open and I feel a sort of invisible fist punching me in the back.

Outside it's sunny. A regular day. A guy's changing his oil. The clouds are regular clouds and the sun's the regular sun and the only non-regular thing is that my clothes smell like Bernie, a combo of wet cellar and rotten bacon.

Work goes well. I manage to keep smiling and hide my shaking hands, and my mid-shift rating is Honeypie. After lunch this older woman comes up and says I look so much like a real Pilot she can hardly stand it.

On her forehead is a thumbprint. Like Ash Wednesday, only sort of glowing.

I don't know what to do. Do I just come out and ask if she wants to see my cock? What if she says no? What if I get caught? What if I show her and she doesn't think it's worth twenty bucks?

Then she asks if I'll surprise her friend with a birthday table dance. She points out her friend. A pretty girl, no thumbprint. Looks somehow familiar.

We start over and at about twenty feet I realize it's Angela.

Angela Silveri.

We dated senior year. Then Dad died and Ma had to take a job at Patty Melt Depot. From all the grease Ma got a bad rash and could barely wear a blouse. Plus Min was running wild. So Angela would come over and there'd be Min getting high under a tarp on the carport and Ma sitting in her bra on a kitchen stool with a fan pointed at her gut. Angela had dreams. She had plans. In her notebook she'd pasted a picture of an office from the J. C. Penney catalogue and under it wrote, "My (someday?) office." Once we saw this black Porsche and she said very nice but make hers red. The last straw was Ed Edwards, a big drunk, one of Dad's cousins. Things got so bad Ma rented him the utility room. One night Angela and I were making out on the couch late when Ed came in soused and started peeing in the dishwasher.

What could I say? He's only barely related to me? He hardly ever does that?

Angela's eyes were like these little pies.

I walked her home, got no kiss, came back, cleaned up the dishwasher as best I could. A few days later I got my class ring in the mail and a copy of "The Prophet."

"You will always be my first love," she'd written inside. "But now my path converges to a higher ground. Be well always. Walk in joy. Please don't think me cruel, it's just that I want so much in terms of accomplishment, plus I couldn't believe that guy peed right on your dishes."

No way am I table-dancing for Angela Silveri. No way am I asking Angela Silveri's friend if she wants to see my cock. No way am I hanging around here so Angela can see me in my flight jacket and T-backs and wonder to herself how I went so wrong, etc., etc.

I hide in the kitchen until my shift is done, then walk home very, very slowly because I'm afraid of what Bernie's going to do to me when I get there.

MIN meets me at the door. She's got flour all over her blouse and it looks like she's been crying.

"I can't take any more of this," she says. "She's like falling apart. I mean shit's falling off her. Plus she made me bake a freaking pie."

On the table is a very lumpy pie. One of Bernie's arms is now disconnected and lying across her lap.

"What are you thinking of!" she shouts. "You didn't show your cock even once? You think it's easy making those thumbprints? You try it, smartass! Do you or do you not know the plan? You gotta get us out of here! And to get us out, you gotta use what you got. And you ain't got much. A nice face. And a decent unit. Not huge, but shaped nice."

"Bernie, God," says Min.

"What, Miss Priss?" shouts Bernie, and slams the severed arm down hard on her lap and her other ear falls off.

"I'm sorry, but this is too fucking sickening," says Min. "I'm going out."

"What's sickening?" says Bernie. "Are you saying I'm sickening? Well, I think you're sickening. So many wonderful things in life and where is your mind? You think with your lazy ass. Whatever life hands you, you take. You're not going anywhere. You're staying home and studying."

"I'm what?" says Min. "Studying what? I ain't studying. Chick comes into my house and starts ordering me to study? I freaking doubt it."

"You don't know nothing!" Bernie says. "What fun is life when you don't know nothing? You can't find your own town on the map. You can't name a single President. When we go to Rome you won't know nothing about the history. You're going to study the World Book. Do we still have those World Books?"

"Yeah right," says Min. "We're going to Rome."

"We'll go to Rome when he's a lawyer," says Bernie.

"Dream on, chick," says Min. "And we'll go to Mars when I'm a stockbreaker."

"Don't you dare make fun of me!" Bernie shouts, and our only vase goes flying across the room and nearly nails Min in the head.

"She's been like this all day," says Min.

"Like what?" shouts Bernie. "We had a perfectly nice day."

"She made me help her try on my bras," says Min.

"I never had a nice sexy bra," says Bernie.

"And now mine are all ruined," says Min. "They got this sort of goo on them."

"You ungrateful shit!" shouts Bernie. "Do you know what I'm doing for you? I'm saving your boy. And you got the nerve to say I made goo on your bras! Troy's gonna get caught in a crossfire in the courtyard. In September. September 18th. He's gonna get thrown right off his little trike. With one leg twisted under him and blood pouring out of his ear. It's a freaking prophecy. You know that word? It means prediction. You know that word? You think I'm bullshitting? Well, I ain't bullshitting. I got the power. Watch this: All day Jade sat licking labels at a desk by a window. Her boss bought everybody subs for lunch. She's bringing some home in a green bag."

"That ain't true about Troy, is it?" says Min. "Is it? I don't believe it."

"Turn on the TV!" Bernie shouts. "Give me the changer."

I turn on the TV. I give her the changer. She puts on "Nathan's Body Shop." Nathan says washboard abs drive the women wild. Then there's a closeup of his washboard abs.

"Oh yes," says Bernie. "Them are for me. I'd like to give those a lick. A lick and a pinch. I'd like to sort of straddle those things."

Just then Jade comes through the door with a big green bag.

"Oh God," says Min.

"Told you so!" says Bernie, and pokes Min in the ribs. "Ha ha! I really got the power!"

"I don't get it," Min says, all desperate. "What happens? Please. What happens to him? You better freaking tell me."

"I already told you," Bernie says. "He'll fly about fifteen feet and live about three minutes."

"Bernie, God," Min says, and starts to cry. "You used to be so nice."

"I'm still so nice," says Bernie, and bites into a sub and takes off the tip of her finger and starts chewing it up.

Just after dawn she shouts out my name.

"Take the blanket off," she says. "I ain't feeling so good."

I take the blanket off. She's basically just this pile of parts: both arms in her lap, head on the arms, heel of one foot touching the heel of the other, all of it sort of wrapped up in her dress.

"Get me a washcloth," she says. "Do I got a fever? I feel like I got a fever. Oh, I knew it was too good to be true. But O.K. New plan. New plan. I'm changing the first part of Phase One. If you see two thumbprints, that means the lady'll screw you for cash. We're in a fix here. We gotta speed this up. There ain't gonna be nothing left of me. Who's gonna be my lover now?"

The doorbell rings.

"Son of a bitch," Bernie snarls.

It's Father Brian with a box of doughnuts. I step out quick and close the door behind me. He says he's just checking in. Perhaps we'd like to talk? Perhaps we're feeling some residual anger about Bernie's situation? Which would of course be completely understandable. Once when he was a young priest someone broke in and drew a mustache on the Virgin Mary with a permanent marker, and for weeks he was tortured by visions of bending back the finger of the vandal until he or she broke into tears of apology.

"I knew that wasn't appropriate," he says. "I knew that by indulging in that fantasy I was honoring violence. And yet it gave me pleasure. I also thought of catching them in the act and boinking them in the head with a rock. I also thought of jumping up and down on their backs until something in their spinal column cracked. Actually I had about a million ideas. But you know what I did instead? I scrubbed and scrubbed our Holy Mother, and soon she was as good as new. Her statue, I mean. She herself of course is always good as new."

From inside comes the sound of breaking glass. Breaking glass and then something heavy falling, and Jade yelling and Min yelling and the babies crying.

"Oops, I guess?" he says. "I've come at a bad time? Look, all I'm trying to do is urge you, if at all possible, to forgive the perpetrators, as I forgave the perpetrators that drew on the Virgin Mary. The thing lost, after all, is only your aunt's body, and what is essential, I assure you, is elsewhere, being well taken care of."

I nod. I smile. I say thanks for stopping by. I take the doughnuts and go back inside.

The TV's broke and the refrigerator's tipped over and Bernie's parts are strewn across the living room like she's been shot out of a cannon.

"She tried to get up," says Jade.

"I don't know where the hell she thought she was going," says Min.

"Come here," the head says to me, and I squat down. "That's it for me. I'm fucked. As per usual. Always the bridesmaid, never the bride. Although come to think of it I was never even the freaking bridesmaid. Look, show your cock. It's the shortest line between two points. The world ain't giving away nice lives. You got a trust fund? You a genius? Show your cock. It's what you got. And remember: Troy in September. On his trike. One leg twisted. Don't forget. And also. Don't remember me like this. Remember me like how I was that night we all went to Red

Lobster and I had that new perm. Ah Christ. At least buy me a stone."

I rub her shoulder, which is next to her foot.

"We loved you," I say.

"Why do some people get everything and I got nothing?" she says. "Why? Why was that?"

"I don't know," I say.

"Show your cock," she says, and dies again.

We stand there looking down at the pile of parts. Mac crawls toward it and Min moves him back with her foot.

"This is too freaking much," says Jade, and starts crying.

"What do we do now?" says Min.

"Call the cops," Jade says.

"And say what?" says Min.

We think about this awhile.

I get a Hefty bag. I get my winter gloves.

"I ain't watching," says Jade.

"I ain't watching either," says Min, and they take the babies into the bedroom.

I close my eyes and wrap Bernie up in the Hefty bag and twistie-tie the bag shut and lug it out to the trunk of the K-car. I throw in a shovel. I drive up to St. Leo's. I lower the bag into the hole using a bungee cord, then fill the hole back in.

Down in the city are the nice houses and the so-so houses and the lovers making out in dark yards and the babies crying for their moms and I wonder if, other than Jesus, this has ever happened before. Maybe it happens all the time. Maybe there's angry dead all over, hiding in rooms, covered with blankets, bossing around their scared embarrassed relatives. Because how would we know?

I for sure don't plan on broadcasting this.

I smooth over the dirt and say a little prayer: If it was wrong for her to come back, forgive her, she never got beans in this life, plus she was trying to help us.

At the car I think of an additional prayer: But please don't let her come back again.

WHEN I get home the babies are asleep and Jade and Min are watching a phone-sex infomercial, three girls in leather jumpsuits eating bananas in slo-mo while across the screen runs a constant disclaimer: "Not Necessarily the Girls Who Man the Phones! Not Necessarily the Girls Who Man the Phones!"

"Them chicks seem to really be enjoying those bananas," says Min in a thin little voice.

"I like them jumpsuits, though," says Jade.

"Yeah, them jumpsuits look decent," says Min.

Then they look up at me. I've never seen them so sad and beat and sick.

"It's done," I say.

Then we hug and cry and promise never to forget Bernie the way she really was, and before bed I use some Resolve on the rug and they do a little reading in their World Books.

Next day I go in early. I don't see a single thumbprint. But it doesn't matter. I get with Sonny Vance and he tells me how to do it. First you ask the woman would she like a private tour. Then you show her the fake P-40, the Gallery of Historical Aces, the shower stall where we get oiled up, etc., etc., and then in the hall near the rest room you ask if there's anything else she'd like to see. It's sleazy. It's gross. But when I do it I think of September. September and Troy in the crossfire, his little leg bent under him, etc., etc.

Most say no but quite a few say yes.

I've got a place picked out at a complex called Swan's Glen. They've never had a shooting or a knifing and the public school is great and every Saturday they have a nature walk for kids behind the clubhouse.

For every hundred bucks I make, I set aside five for Bernie's stone.

What do you write on something like that? LIFE PASSED HER BY? DIED DISAPPOINTED? CAME BACK TO LIFE BUT FELL APART? All true, but too sad, and no way I'm writing any of those.

BERNIE KOWALSKI, it's going to say. BELOVED AUNT.

Sometimes she comes to me in dreams. She never looks good. Sometimes she's wearing a dirty smock. Once she had on handcuffs. Once she was naked and dirty and this mean cat was clawing its way up her front. But every time it's the same thing.

"Some people get everything and I got nothing," she says. "Why? Why did that happen?"

Every time I say I don't know.

And I don't. ◆

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A CRITIC AT LARGE

CONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE

The sharpest review of "Speak, Memory," the author's memoir, was written by Nabokov himself in 1950, but never published.

BY VLADIMIR NABOKOV

THE two books of memoirs before me, one by a Russian-born author, now a citizen of this country, the other by the granddaughter of a great American educationalist, are extremely elaborate affairs. It is seldom that two such accomplishments reach a reviewer's desk practically on the same day.

The small bunch of Mr. Nabokov's admirers will be not unreasonably elated by the publication of his new work. Although to subtitle it "memoirs" seems an obvious step, there are certain features—not necessarily virtues—about "Conclusive Evidence" [the original title of "Speak, Memory"] that set it completely apart from extant autobiographies, true, more or less true, or deliberately fictitious. If its originality is not quite as attractive as the deep human glow that suffuses every page of Miss Braun's "When Lilacs Last," it contains, on the other hand, special sources of pleasure that no intelligent reader should miss.

A unique freak as autobiographies go, Mr. Nabokov's book is easier to define in terms of what it is not than in terms of what it is. It is not, for instance, one of those garrulous, formless, and rambling affairs, heavily relying on a diarist's notes, that experts in other arts or the administrators of our public existence are apt to produce ("Wednesday night, around 11:40, General So-and-So telephoned. I said to him—"). Nor is it a professional writer's kitchen, with bits of unused material floating in a tepid brew of literary and personal stuff. Emphatically, it is not the popular slick kind of reminiscence where the author keys himself up to the lofty level of Grade-C fiction, and with quiet impudence sets down reams and reams of dialogue (Maw and the neighbor, Maw and the children, Bill and Paw, Bill and Picasso) which no human brain could have preserved in anything approaching that particular form.

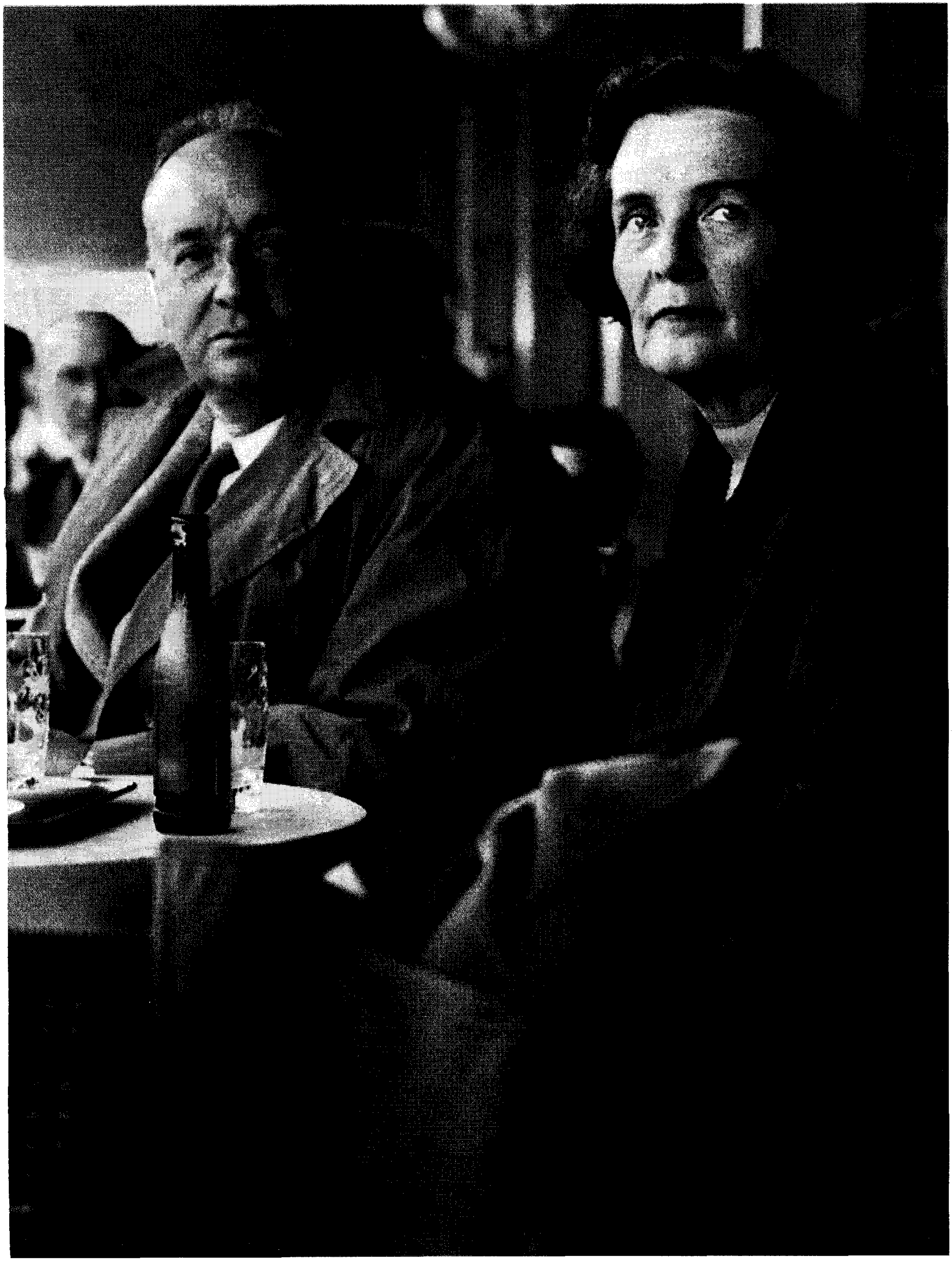
It would seem to the reviewer that the permanent importance "Conclusive Evidence" has lies in its being the meeting point of an impersonal art form and a very personal life story. Nabokov's method is to explore the remotest regions of his past life for what may be termed thematic trails or currents. Once found, this or that theme is followed up through the years. In the course of its development it guides the author into new regions of life. The diamond pattern of art and the muscles of sinuous memory are combined in one strong and supple movement and produce a style that seems to slip through grass and flowers toward the warm flat stone upon which it will richly coil.

The reader will surely enjoy finding for himself the convolutions, the stepping stones, the various smiling disguises of this or that thematic line running through the book. There are some main lines and there are numerous subordinate ones, and all of them are combined in a way recalling chess compositions, riddles of various kinds, but all tending to their chess-apotheosis form, in fact, a theme reappearing in almost every chapter: jigsaw puzzles; an armorial checkerboard; certain "rhythmic patterns"; the "contrapuntal" nature of fate; life's "blending of lines of play"; a chess game on board ship while Russia recedes; Sirin's novels; his interest in chess problems; the "emblemata" on pieces of broken pottery; a final picture puzzle completing the spiral of the theme.

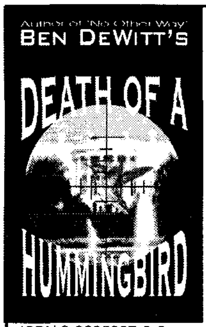
Possibly the most moving theme in the book is the line of exile, to which I shall have to refer again. In a way Nabokov went through all the sorrows and

COURTESY THE ESTATE OF VLADIMIR NABOKOV

"One cannot help being irritated by cer



iarities of Nabokov's manner, by his tendency to dabble in esoteric sensations," Nabokov writes. The author and his sister, Elena, in 1961.



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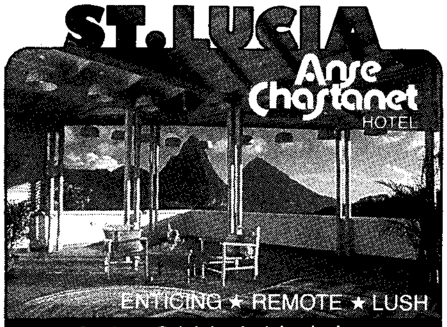

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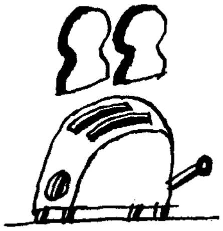
delights of nostalgia long before the Revolution had removed the scenery of his young years. He is out to prove that his childhood contained, on a much reduced scale, the main components of his creative maturity; thus, through the thin sheath of a ripe chrysalis one can see, in its small wing cases, the dawning of color and pattern, a miniature revelation of the butterfly that will soon emerge and let its flushed and diced wings expand to many times their pupal size.



The unravelling of a riddle is the purest and most basic act of the human mind. All thematic lines mentioned are gradually brought together, are seen to interweave or converge, in a subtle but natural form of contact which is as much a function of art as it is a discoverable process in the evolution of a personal destiny. Thus, toward the end of the book, the theme of mimicry, of the "cryptic disguise" studied by Nabokov in his entomological pursuits, comes to a punctual rendezvous with the riddle theme, with the camouflaged solution of a chess problem, with the piecing together of a design on bits of broken pottery, and with a picture puzzle wherein the eye makes out the contours of a new country. To the same point of convergence other thematic lines arrive in haste, as if consciously yearning for the blissful anastomosis provided jointly by art and fate. The solution of the riddle theme is also the solution of the theme of exile, of the intrinsic loss running through the whole book, and these lines blend, in their turn, with the culmination of the rainbow theme ("a spiral of life in an agate"), and merge, at a most satisfying *rond-point*, with the many garden paths and park walks and forest trails meandering through the book. One cannot but respect the amount of retrospective acumen and creative concentration that the author had to summon in order to plan his book according to the way his life had been planned by unknown players of games, and never to swerve from that plan.

VLADIMIR NABOKOV was born in 1899, in St. Petersburg. His father, also Vladimir, was a highly cultured European, a scholarly statesman, a robust and cheerful rebel, whose brothers and brothers-in-law were, at the best, easygoing conservatives and, at the worst, active reactionaries, but who belonged himself to the Liberal Group that opposed, in Parliament and in widely read periodicals, the autocratic trends and iniquities of the Tsar's regime. American readers of today, whose information concerning Tsarist Russia is thoroughly permeated by Communist propaganda and pro-Soviet accounts that were spread here in the twenties, will be surprised to learn from various passages in "Conclusive Evidence" how freely opinions could be expressed and how much could be done by civilized people in pre-Revolution Russia.

Life in the wealthy, landowning upper stratum to which the Nabokovs belonged had some affinities with Southern opulence in this country and was very similar to manor life in England and France. The summers, spent by the author as a boy in the country, seem to have been especially responsible for shaping him. The region, with its scattered villages among great forests and marshes, was meagrely populated, but numerous ancient footpaths (the mysterious trails that webbed the whole Empire from immemorial times) kept the berry-gatherer, the tramp, the squire's pretty children from losing themselves in the woods. And, because most of those ways and the wastes they passed by or led to were nameless, landowning families, from generation to generation, designated them by the names that under the influence of French governesses and tutors had naturally come into being during the children's daily promenades and frequent picnics—Chemin du Pendu, Pont des Vaches, Amerique, and so on.

The author of "Conclusive Evidence"—and, by a pleasing coincidence, the author of "When Lilacs Last," too—was the eldest of five children. But, unlike Miss Braun, Nabokov has very little to say about his siblings—two brothers and two sisters, born, respectively, in 1900, 1911, 1903, and 1906. The powerful concentration on one's own personality, the act of an artist's indefatigable and invincible will, has to bear certain consequences, and the above phenomenon is, no doubt, one of them.

With the author's permission, I am enabled to mention here some of my accidental contacts with his family. A first cousin of his, also a citizen of this country, tells me that, in their youth, Nabokov's sisters and youngest brother wrote lyrical verse with an uncanny facility (shared by countless young Russians of that generation). At a literary soirée in Prague, sometime in the early twenties (1923, probably), I remember Franz Kafka's friend, ———, the talented Czech translator of Dostoyevski and Rozanov, pointing out to me Nabokov's mother, a small gray-haired woman in black accompanied by a young girl with limpid eyes and a radiant complexion, Nabokov's sister Elena. In the thirties, when living in Paris, I happened to meet Nabokov's brother Sergei: despite less than a year's difference between the two, they seemed to have led totally separate lives since early adolescence, attending different schools and having different sets of friends. When I knew Sergei he was drifting in a hedonistic haze, among the cosmopolitan Montparnassian crowd that has been so often depicted by a certain type of American writer. His linguistic and musical gifts dissolved in the indolence of his nature. I have reason to think that his childhood had never been as happy as that of his parents' favorite son. Accused of Anglo-Saxon sympathies, Sergei, an outspoken and fearless man, despite his effeminate looks, was arrested by the Germans and died in a concentration camp in 1944.

In the beautiful pages of "When Lilacs Last" which tell of Miss Braun's earliest recollections, she alludes to the security of a world in which the tapping of sugar maples or the birthday cake Mother made were natural and permanent fixtures, as familiar and dear to the New England patrician or Philadelphia princeling of today as they had been to his simple, hardworking forefathers two or three generations before. The world of Nabokov's past, on the other hand, has a singular air of luminous brittleness that is one of the main themes in his book. With great perspicacity, Nabokov stresses the very curious pre-visions of later losses which haunted his childhood—enhancing perhaps its delights. In a conspicuous spot of his St. Petersburg nursery there hung a small colored picture "in the bright sportive English style, used for hunting scenes and the like, that lends itself so well to the making of jigsaw puzzles"; it represented, with appropriate humor, a French nobleman's family in exile: daisies studded a meadow and there was a cow somewhere and a blue sky, and the fat elderly nobleman, in his brilliantly speckled camisole and puce breeches, sat dejectedly on a milking stool while his wife and daughters busied themselves with some daintily hued washing on a clothesline. Here and there on the Nabokovs' estate in the country, the author's parents, as if come home after years of travel, would point out the fond landmarks of events enfolded in an impalpable but somehow ever-present past. In the cypress alleys of Crimean gardens (where Pushkin had walked a hundred years before) young Nabokov amused and annoyed a girlfriend of his, who had a taste for romantic literature, by commenting upon his own movements or words in the reminiscent, slightly mincing manner his companion might be supposed to develop many years later when writing her memoir (in the style of memoirs connected with Pushkin): "Nabokov liked cherries, especially ripe ones," or "He had a way of slitting his eyes when looking at the low sun," or "I remember one night, as we were reclining on a turfy bank," and so forth—a game that was surely silly but seems less silly now when it is seen to fall into the pattern of predicted loss, of pathetic attempts to retain the doomed, the departing, the lovely dying things of a life that was trying, rather desperately, to think of itself in terms of future retrospection.

When the Revolution broke out, in the spring of 1917, Nabokov, Sr., participated in the provisional government and later, when the Bolshevik dictatorship took over, was a member of another short-lived provisional government in the frail still free south. The group to which these Russian intellectuals belonged, liberals and non-Communist Socialists alike, shared the basic views of Western democrats. However, American intellectuals of today, who got their Russian history from Communist and Communist-sponsored sources, know simply nothing about the period. Bolshevik histories naturally played down pre-Revolution democratic struggle, minimized and violently distorted it,

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A Vacation To Remember

and hurled at it coarse propaganda insults ("reactionaries," "lackeys," "reptiles," etc.), not unlike the way Soviet journalists dub today's surprised American officials "Fascists." The surprise is thirty years late.

The readers of Nabokov's book will notice the extraordinary similarity between the present attitude of former Leninists and disgruntled Stalinists in this country toward Soviet Russia and the unpopular opinions Russian intellectuals kept expressing in émigré periodicals during the three decades immediately following the Bolshevik Revolution, while our enthusiastic radicals were prostrating themselves in adoration before Soviet Russia. One has to assume that the émigré political writers were either many years ahead of their time in the understanding of the true spirit and inevitable evolution of the Soviet regime or that they possessed an intuition and a foresight bordering on the miraculous.

WE vividly visualize Miss Braun's college years. Not so with the author of "Conclusive Evidence," for he has nothing whatsoever to say about the classes he surely must have attended. After leaving Russia at the outset of the Soviet era, Nabokov completed his education at Cambridge University. From 1922 to 1940, he dwelt in various parts of Europe, mainly Berlin and Paris. Incidentally, it is curious to compare Nabokov's rather gruesome impressions of Berlin between the two wars with Mr. Spender's contemporaneous but far more lyrical recollections (as published in the *Partisan* a couple of years ago), especially the bit about "relentlessly handsome German youths."

In describing his literary activities during the years of voluntary exile in Europe, Mr. Nabokov adopts the somewhat annoying method of referring to himself in the third person as "Sirin"—a literary pseudonym under which he was, and still is, well known in the limited but highly cultured and discriminating world of Russian expatriates. It is true that, having practically stopped being a Russian writer, he is free to discuss Sirin's work as separate from his own. But one is inclined to think that his true purpose here is to project himself, or at least his most treasured self, into the picture he paints. One is reminded of those problems of "objectivity" that the philosophy of science brings up. An observer makes a detailed picture of the whole universe, but when he has finished he realizes that it still lacks something: his own self. So he puts himself in it too. But again a "self" remains outside and so forth, in an endless sequence of projections, like those advertisements that depict a girl holding a picture of herself holding a picture of herself holding a picture that only coarse printing prevents one's eye from making out.

"And, just to be on the safe side, tongue of attorney."

In fact, Nabokov has gone a step further and under the mask of Sirin has projected a tertiary persona called Vasili Shishkov. This action was the outcome of a ten-year-old feud he had been carrying on with the most gifted of the émigré critics, George Adamovich, who had rejected at first, then reluctantly accepted, and finally admired with many an enthusiastic flourish Sirin's prose, but still kept pooh-poohing his verse. With the sporting coöperation of a review's editor, Nabokov-Sirin assumed the name of Shishkov. On an August day in 1939, Adamovich, reviewing in the Russian-language newspaper *Poslednie Novosti* (published in Paris) the sixty-ninth issue of the quarterly *Sovremennye Zapiski* (also published in Paris), lavished inordinate praise on Shishkov's poem "The Poets" and suggested that at this late date the Russian emigration might have at last produced a great poet. In the fall of the same year, in the same newspaper, Sirin described at length an imaginary interview he had had with "Vasili Shishkov." In a groggy but still game reply Adamovich said that he doubted it was a hoax but added that Sirin might be inventive enough to enact inspiration and genius that would greatly surpass his, Sirin's, capacities. Very soon after that, the Second World War put an end to Russian literature in Paris. I am afraid I cannot quite believe the author of "Conclusive Evidence" when, in his recollections of literary life, he stresses the perfect indifference he has always had in regard to criticism, adverse or favorable. Anyway, a ghoulish, vindictive, and sometimes rather foolish streak used to show in his own critical articles.

HOW do we learn the great secret wrapped in words? We see that a foreigner generally fails to acquire a perfect, native sense of their import. He has not lived from infancy in the quiet reception and unconscious study of them, and has not felt how one word is allied to others and how one age—with its writings, its unrecorded traditions, and its common style of conversation—flows into another. In her beautiful, compassionate, intensely feminine quest through the kingdom of things past, Miss Braun has one difficulty less to surmount than Nabokov. True, the Russian author had English governesses when he was a child and spent three

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college years in England. To bring up Conrad's case in reference to Nabokov's novels written in English ("The Real Life of Sebastian Knight" and "Bend Sinister") would mean missing the point of the latter's achievement. Conrad—whose English style, anyway, was a collection of glorified clichés—had not had twenty years of intense participation in Polish literature behind him when he started on his British career. Nabokov, on the other hand, when he switched to English, was the author of several novels and numerous short stories in Russian, and indeed had gained a lasting place in Russian literature, despite the fact that his books were banned in his mother country. The only analogy in this respect is that both men might have chosen French as readily as English. As a matter of fact, Nabokov's first attempt, in the middle thirties, at original prose in a language not his own was a story he wrote in French ("Mademoiselle O"), which Paulhan published in *Mesures*. (An English version of this, with most of the fiction weeded out by its author, appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly* and was reprinted in "Nine Stories.") In a new, revised, expanded form, with the last remnants of fiction abolished, the story settled down to its final state as Chapter 5 of this volume.

The present reviewer has an odd recollection of hearing Nabokov lecture in brilliant French at a certain *soirée littéraire*—in 1937, I believe—in a Parisian concert hall. A Hungarian lady writer, today forgotten but then very much à la mode as the author of a French best-seller (something about a fishing cat), who was scheduled to speak that night, had wired a few hours before the lecture that she could not come, and Gabriel Marcel, one of the organizers of that series of talks, had prevailed upon Nabokov to appear as a last-minute substitute with a lecture in French on Pushkin (later published in the *Nouvelle Revue Française*). The lecturer's *acte gratuite* (as Mr. Auden charmingly misgenders it) was prefaced by a curious movement, a kind of whirlpool in the audience. The whole Hungarian colony had bought tickets; some of them were leaving upon finding out about the change in the program. Other Hungarians stayed on in blissful ignorance. Most of the French contingent had drifted away, too. In the wings, the

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Hungarian Envoy was violently shaking hands with Nabokov, whom he mistook for the lady's husband. Alerted Russian expatriates had loyally rallied and were doing their best to stitch up the ever-widening holes in the house. Paul and Lucie Léon, faithful friends of Nabokov, had brought James Joyce as a special surprise. A Hungarian soccer team occupied the first row.

Today Mr. Nabokov must find it strange to recall the literary vagaries of his young years. With his wife and son, he now lives in this country, of which he is a citizen; lives happily, I understand, in the simple disguise of an obscure college professor of literature with spacious vacations devoted to butterfly hunting in the West. In lepidopterological circles he is known as a somewhat eccentric taxonomist with analytic rather than synthetic leanings. In American scientific journals, he has published various discoveries of his own relating to new species or forms of butterflies; and—in a scientific tradition that seems to impress so many lay reporters—other entomologists have named butterflies and moths after him. The American Museum of Natural History, in New York, and the Museum of Comparative Zoology, at Harvard, preserve Nabokov's type specimens. On a visit to the latter institution I was shown several tiny moths—belonging to a marvellously multiform genus—which Nabokov discovered in the Wasatch Mountains of Utah in 1943. One of these McDunnough has named *Eupithecia nabokovi*. This is a delightfully satisfying resolution of a certain thematic line of "Conclusive Evidence," in which Nabokov tells how passionately he had dreamed in his boyhood of discovering a new member of that particular group.

TWELVE chapters of "Conclusive Evidence" appeared in *The New Yorker*—and here this reviewer, who happens to be in the know, would like to explain a few things. First of all, in comparing the present text with the *New Yorker* one, it will be noted that in a number of cases (Chapters 3, 6, 10, and 12 offer especially conspicuous examples) chunks of new matter, such as the excursions into Mr. Nabokov's ancestry, his tribulations while collecting butterflies in Europe, an interpolation referring to Polenka, and many new de-

WINTER TALE

THE BUCK STOPS HERE

A MAN in a bar told me about his Uncle Andy who had lived and, several years ago, died on Michigan's Upper Peninsula. On a winter night, with a cord of firewood in the back of his pickup, he was driving home on a lightly travelled rural road (the U.P. has no other kind). As he made a turn, his lights raked a magnificent eight-point buck standing on the center-line. Uncle Andy braked, skidded; the beast perhaps also tried to evade—or didn't, depending on whether there is truth to the cliché about deer in headlights. At any rate, evasive maneuvers proved insufficient, or perhaps mutually defeating, and the encounter ended with impact. The huge animal flew over the hood, crashed through the windshield, and landed squarely against Uncle Andy—not, however, killing him, but its enormous dead weight did pin him to his seat, and the impact stalled out the truck. Uncle Andy sat in the suddenly quiet vehicle as its headlights slowly yellowed and dimmed, with two hundred pounds of dead deer across his chest and his right hand trembling inches from the ignition key, which, turned, would have restored heat to the cab. He froze to death.

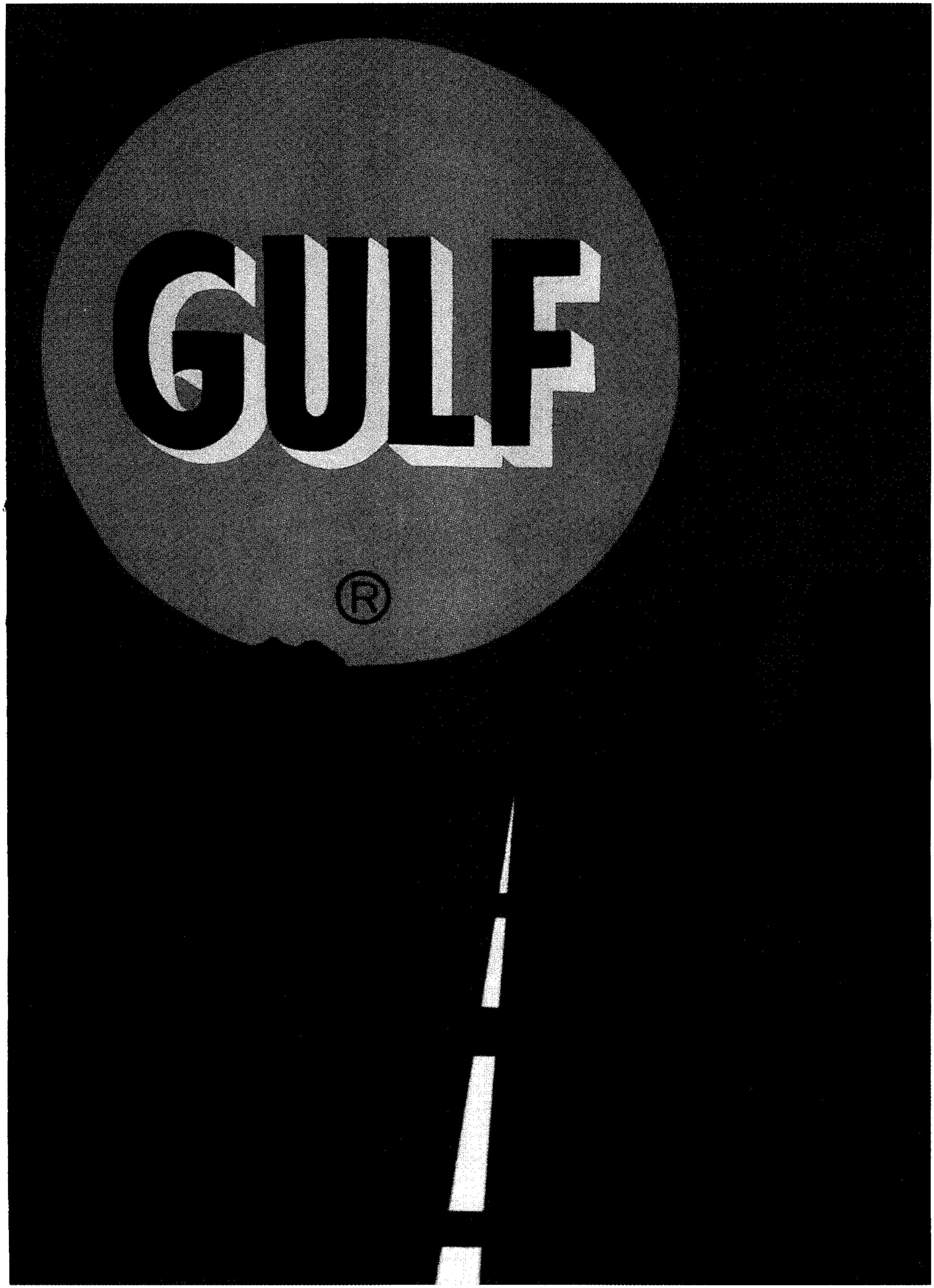
When I heard the story, I couldn't help tracing past its punch line. It would have been a long, cold night as Uncle Andy sat with his face flecked by the touch and wet of the odd eddying flake of snow, his field of vision largely occluded by the deer hulk cooling in his lap, his ears tuned for the hiss of oncoming tires but receiving only the delicate forest sounds that emerged from the snowfall quiet. No doubt he speculated about the frequency of traffic as he noted the symptoms of advancing hypothermia and thought, perhaps, about the larger questions.

One pictures the tableau that greeted his discoverer the next day: four stiff legs canted up out of the truck's windshield like a naval gun battery, their outline softened by a night's worth of snow; Uncle Andy inside, his right arm stretched over the carcass, bare chapped hand extended toward the steering column, eyes wide, eyebrows and lashes frosted, icicle suspended from the tip of his nose. It is a picture so precisely composed that the person who first stumbled on it might have looked around for a small marker giving the work's title, year, and media: "Serendipity," 1989 (steel, chrome, white-tailed deer, Uncle Andy). This raises the question of the artist's identity, but of course we all know it, and that he doesn't sign.

The picture contains its own history. Past and present imply each other, giving us the perspective of a being for whom time holds no mysteries. The squeal of brakes and the spatter of glass are simultaneous with the lofty silence that follows. The future is there, too: the bootcrunch and bark of workers hoisting away the deer with the whine of a wrecker's hydraulic lift, and then the snap of Uncle Andy's bones as his body is forced into a configuration that will permit its extraction from the cab. He is carted away, limbs twisted and fingers bent to claws, grinning as he stares at the ceiling of the ambulance, his nose-icicle now riding at the horizontal.

I sat at the bar with these thoughts; the story's narrator, sitting next to me, had lapsed into a Marlow-like reflective silence. Perhaps he was brooding about his own figurative white-tailed buck, out there even now, placidly cropping the sawgrass, biding the days that separated it and him from their fated convergence. His parka (the bar was in a small town in Wisconsin, and the season was winter) rested high, so that the teeth of its open zipper touched his chin; he was gazing down at the two calloused hands crowded round his shot glass. A loud "Last call!" did not disturb his stare.

I went out into the parking lot, where six or seven vehicles remained, most of them with engines rumbling but empty as ghost ships, their owners indoors waiting for the cars to warm. I set my own car to idling, got the scraper off the dash, worked briefly on the windshield, then went back inside. The man I had been talking to—his name was Coombs—was as I had left him, a hillock of Gore-Tex hunched over a whiskey. The jukebox had been unplugged. The half-dozen remaining customers, all of them men, sat scattered in the quiet, each staring at a point in space. At the bar, Coombs began to weep. —ETHAN COEN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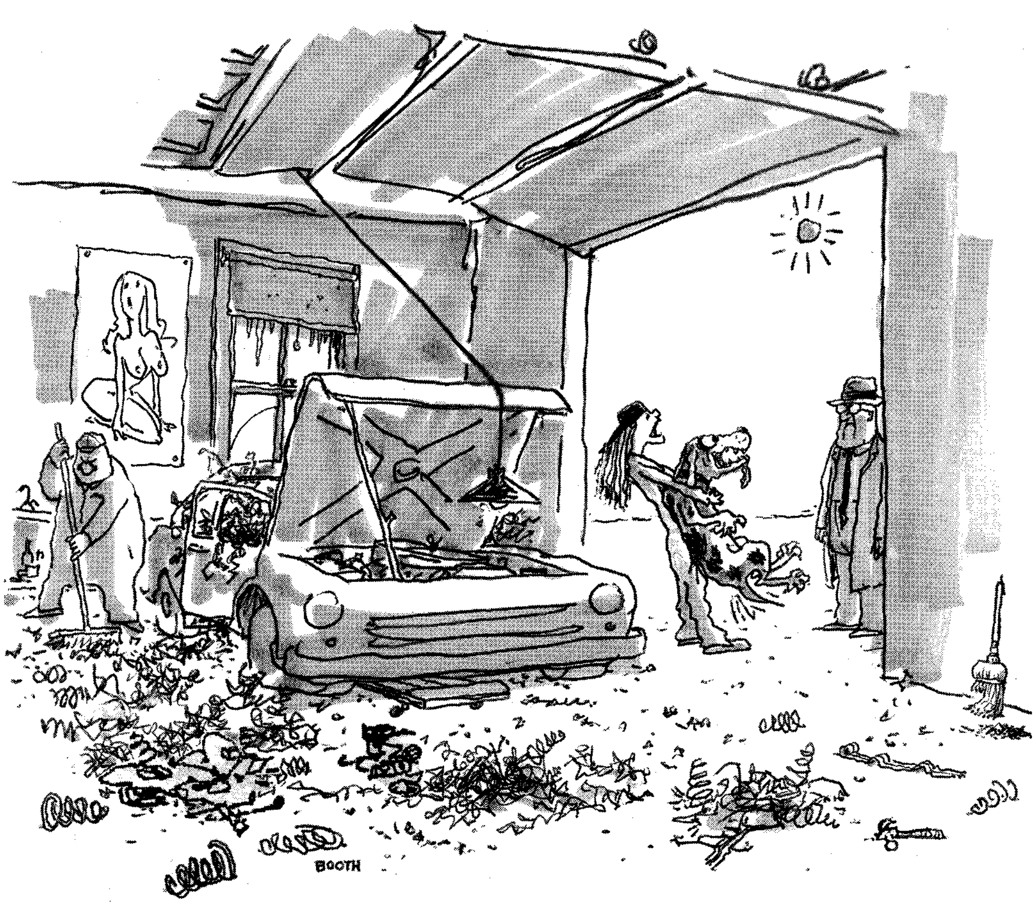

"The dog got locked in your car last night, Mr. Ferguson."

• •

tails of his life in St. Petersburg and on the Crimean Riviera, have been added by Nabokov in the process of working on his book after the chapters in question had already appeared in their *New Yorker* form.

In the second place there are those, much less important, discrepancies between the present text and the *New Yorker* one, which are to be explained by the author's reinstating a few scattered words or clusters of words that had been left out—with his reluctant consent—by *The New Yorker*, either for "family magazine" reasons or because *The New Yorker* pessimistically thought that an unusual term might bother some of its less brainy readers. In the latter case, Mr. Nabokov did not always give in, and this resulted in some spirited fights. Some of them, such as the Battle of the Palpebral Night, Nabokov lost. Others he won.

Finally, there was the question of corrected grammar. This kind, or indeed any kind, of editing would have seemed a monstrous insult to Nabokov, had the *Sovremennye Zapiski*, in the old days, asked Sirin's permission to alter in any way a sentence in his Russian prose. But as an English-writing author Nabokov has always felt insecure. For all the dash and raciness of his English, he has a way of lapsing into solecisms, some of which are rather astonishing in view of his general sophistication. Therefore, the minor improvements suggested by the *New Yorker* editors—the curing of an inversion, the bracing up of some awkwardly drooping term, the splitting of a long sentence in two, the ritualistic transformation of "which"s into "that"s were meekly and gratefully accepted by Mr. Nabokov. What skirmishes there were took place, usually, around the editors' inadvertently destroying a treasured rhythm, or wrongly interpreting an allusion, or tending to replace by nouns every "he" and "she" and "we" that had strayed into the next paragraph, leaving the reader to scratch his little head. And, more especially, there was the Missing Antecedent case that cropped up again and again, leading to many tussles in the course of which Mr. Nabokov, an Anti-antecedent of long standing, often knew defeat but also won a few choice victories.

It would seem that at the very beginning of Nabokov's association with *The New Yorker* editorial attempts to clarify seeming ambiguities and trim his prose were much more carefree and frequent than at a later stage. Howls of pain would come from the author, and mutterings about the unworthiness of compliance with a magazine's tastes. Gradually, however, the editing department realized that the labor it expended on the construction of a solid bridge to join any two ideas that seemed to exceed the span of a commuter's mind was a rather unnecessary albeit well-meaning procedure, since the author had taken even more trouble to destroy or lift or camouflage a bridge that spoiled the landscape.

The reader, however, must now be shown the other side of the matter. Great sympathy, a delicate and loving care, marked all editorial queries. The explanations or amplifications now and then asked for by Mr. Ross ("How many bathrooms did the house have?") were often granted by Mr. Nabokov and resulted in some delightful new paragraphs. Katharine White, who corresponded with the author in regard to all these matters, took endless trouble to check every hyphen and comma and smooth the creases in an author's ruffled temper and do everything to keep Nabokov's prose intact. An excellent proof of the harmonious accord between author and editor is the fact that Nabokov greedily preserved the majority of the corrections in regard to his skittish syntax and also the beautiful "close" system of the *New Yorker* punctuation. Last but not least, *The New Yorker's* wonderful research department several times saved Mr. Nabokov—who seems to combine a good deal of absent-mindedness with his pedantism—from various blunders regarding names, numbers, book titles, and the like. Now and then he disagreed with the department's findings, and then some amusing exchanges occurred. One of them had to do with the funnel of the Atlantic liner Champlain. Nabokov distinctly remembered it as white. A *New Yorker* checker talked to the French Line: the line said the Champlain had not been camouflaged in 1940 and had at the time its usual red-and-black French Line funnel. Nabokov replied that he could omit the epithet altogether but that nothing could induce him to change a color he so clearly remembered. He wondered if perhaps the military authorities at Saint Nazaire had repainted the thing without notifying the French Line office in New York.

I have discussed Nabokov's connection with *The New Yorker* at some length because I think readers ought to know how things stand and draw their own conclusions. The basic question of a writer's integrity can hardly arise when an editor is able to prove to an author that a pet sentence of his bristles with bad grammar and should be improved if the story is to be bought. A magazine, on the other hand, may underrate its average consumer's ability to assimilate the allusive, the oblique, the veiled—and in such cases I do not believe the author should yield, no matter the financial disappointment involved.

BARBARA BRAUN'S poise and taste, the purity and simplicity of her style as sparkling as a New England brook, are qualities not shared by the author of "Conclusive Evidence." One cannot help being irritated by certain peculiarities of Nabokov's manner; by his casual use of terms that little-known scientists have invented for little-known diseases; by his general tendency to dabble in esoteric sensations; by his methods of transliteration (he uses one system—the correct one—for rendering samples of Russian speech, and another system, pockmarked with compromise, for transliterating names); or by such whims of his as suddenly throwing in a chess problem (without giving the key move, which is bishop to _____).

Another matter that cannot fail to offend a certain type of reader (upper-middle-class in the cultural sense) is Nabokov's attitude toward such writers as Freud, Mann, and Eliot, whom tradition and good manners have taught one to respect together with Lenin and Henry James. At the oneiromancy and mythogeny of psychoanalysis Nabokov has been poking rude fun since the twenties. Thomas Mann he places in the Jules Romain Rolland Galsworthy subfamily, somewhere between Upton and Lewis, as he irreverently phrases it (Romain being mathematically equal to Sinclair). He is prone to throw a veritable fit of sarcastic glee when upper-middle-class critics place the plaster of Mann and Eliot beside the marble of Proust and Joyce. Few people will share his contention that Eliot's poetry is essentially platitudinous. I suppose Nabokov is merely trying to be witty when he remarks that the popular success of Eliot's recent play belongs to the same order as "Zootism, Existentialism, and Tito," and, surely, all those whose muse, née Eliotovich, is so huskily vocal in little magazines will fervently agree that calling T.S.E. "the Wally Simpson of American literature" is a sally in very bad taste indeed. Then, too, there is his contempt for Dostoyevski, which makes Russians shudder and is disapproved of in the academic circles of our greatest universities. Perhaps Nabokov's immunity to the sentimental cults American critics have preserved since the twenties and thirties is due to his having gone, during those years, through a Zeitgeistless phase in the world of Russian ascetic exile far removed from "Jazz Age" and "pre-Crash" fashions.

But with all its shortcomings "Conclusive Evidence" still remains a significant contribution. It is "conclusive evidence" in regard to many things, among which the most obvious is that this world is not as bad as it seems. Mr. Nabokov is to be congratulated on having performed a very capable and very necessary job. His memoirs will find a permanent place on the book lover's shelf side by side with Leo Tolstoy's "Childhood," T. S. Elmann's "Amen Corner," and Barbara Braun's "When Lilacs Last." ♦

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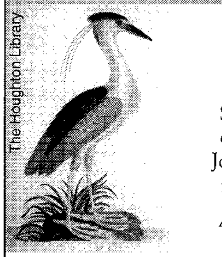

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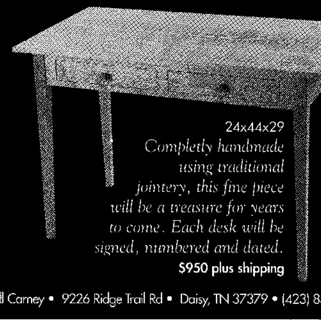

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BRIEFLY NOTED

The Last King of Scotland, by Giles Foden (Knopf; $25). In 1971, Dr. Nicholas Garrigan, more or less for the hell of it, leaves his native Scotland to work in a British clinic in Uganda. Eager for perks, he accepts a post as Idi Amin's private physician. His duties consist mainly of seeing to the gross madman's indigestion, attending to the children of his various wives, and pandering to his whims, until, at last, Nicholas barely gets out of the country with his life. The catch is that, even back in Scotland, he can't quite slip the dictator's sphere of influence. This is all meant to be comically sinister, naïve yet knowing, but the qualities coexist queasily; at the end you wonder whether the story would have any power without its familiar extra-textual events.

T. C. Boyle Stories, by T. Coraghessan Boyle (Viking; $35).These sendups of late-millennial America suggest that our neuroses span a vast cultural abyss: a couple have sex in full-body condoms; a family submits to the demands of its elaborate home alarm system; two lovers are almost driven apart by their obsession with the widespread disappearance of toads. Boyle sketches his characters—both the eccentrics and the average next-door neighbors—with Swiftian good humor and crisp prose; in the best work he tempers his trademark irony with a trace of empathy.

Billy Dead, by Lisa Reardon (Viking; $22.95). With the exception of a big-screen ending, this grim, emphatic first novel is remarkable for its riveting portrait—a grainy home movie, really—of the Johnson family, whose depredations constitute a virtual bestiary of abuse. When Billy, the eldest, dies in a ditch, his death unstoppers not only a decade-old silence between his brother, Ray, and his sister, Jean, but a whole town that has been holding its breath. Reardon owes something to Faulkner; like him, she can summon up the menace of the past, rustling in the dark.

Rara Avis, by Jacqueline Weld (Books & Co.; $24.50). A foulmouthed parrot with the passions of an opera queen; an uncle who stops making unsalable homburgs and turns to making unwearable brassieres instead; a catatonic mama and a papa who's a ladies' man; and two spoiled little girls (one's the narrator) are put on trial for their lives by a kangaroo court in a South American village so hot the air swims. The cooked-up charge is sedition and indolence, but the subject of this quirky, sharp first novel is loyalty's consequences, which are both ferocious and daft.

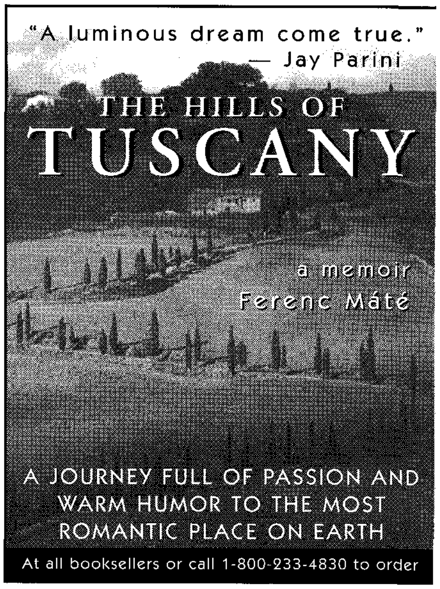
Breakfast on Pluto, by Patrick McCabe (HarperFlamingo; $22). McCabe's careening picaresque follows Patrick Pussy Braden, the bastard son of a priest and his teen-age housekeeper, who grows up with a tart tongue and a taste for women's clothes. The first-person tales of this orphan transvestite—who flees from border-town Ireland to the bars of Piccadilly Circus and back again—mix antic debauch and sudden terror (the tricks, the ticking bombs). Pussy's voice throughout is delightfully unhinged in its match of high camp and the poetic pretensions of the Irish barfly.

The Bridegroom Was a Dog, by Yoko Tawada, translated from the Japanese by Margaret Mitsutani (Kodansha; $19). In the last of these three fast-moving, mysteriously compelling tales, a work of fiction is praised for being based on fact, and the narrator remarks, "I took this as an insult to fantasy, feeling I should stick up for it." Stick up for it this author does, whether as an insouciant mail-order bride in a paranoia-inducing country or in the title piece, about an unquellable heroine who finds herself in thrall to a man who loves to clean everything, including—with his tongue—her. Absolutely polymorphously perverse, these stories have the dream quality of Kafka's and are, moreover, quite funny.

Early Sorrows, by Danilo Kiš, translated from the Serbian by Michael Henry Heim (New Directions; $19.95). This subtle, heroic collection of connected stories concerns the quiet years leading up to calamity: the death of Eduard Sam in Auschwitz. His son, Andy, who serves as Kiš's literary double here and in the two succeeding volumes of the great Yugoslav's autobiographical trilogy ("Garden, Ashes" and "Hourglass"), tends cows at home in Vojvodina and worries over his first kiss as the Second World War approaches. The coming horror is just beneath Kiš's gently swelling prose.

The History of Our World Beyond the Wave, by R. E. Klein (Harcourt Brace; $22). Klein's phantasmal first novel asks, What if the equivalent of a second Flood—"the Big Wave"—were to render the Earth liquid? This time, though, it's not Noah in his ark who escapes destruction but Paul Sant, an English professor from California, on a surf mat. Riding the sometimes treacherous currents and encountering the occasional fellow-survivor, Sant explores a world that has been wiped clean of "income tax, inflation, and nagging uncertainties" and replenished with novelties of nature (fairy-tale caverns, trees with spiky teeth). This elegantly written book is an acid trip between bound covers and, like any intoxicant, makes the real world seem a little duller.

A Painted Field, by Robin Robertson (Harcourt Brace; $22). The genius of this Scots poet is for finding the sensually charged moment—in a raked northern seascape, in a sexual or gustatory encounter—and depicting it in language that is simultaneously spare and ample, and reminiscent of early Heaney or Hughes: a half-burned log is "black in the flocculent / smother of grey." The tension here is between an awareness of the moral conundrum that politics and violence present to art, and a loyalty to depicting the more local worlds of nature and individual experience.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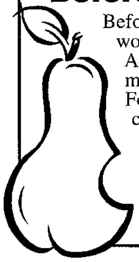

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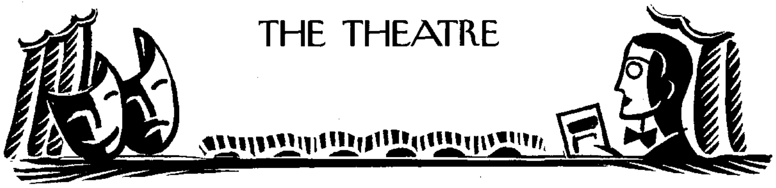

ANCIENT AND MODERN

The fresh drama of "Electra," a new musical, and a glimpse of Kidman.

BY JOHN LAHR

THE greatest show on earth is the show of human emotion. The first playwright to tap this power for drama was Sophocles (496-406 B.C.), who in his ninety years wrote about a hundred plays, only seven of which survive, and who, to all intents and purposes, invented dramatic technique. His innovation was simple and profound: as Aristotle puts it, Sophocles "increased the number of actors to three." With the three-character scene, the stage became dynamic rather than declamatory—an arena where characters could interrupt, contradict each other, and reverse the plot. In the designer Johan Engels's blending of ancient and modern for David Leveaux's powerful production of Sophocles' "Electra" (a new version by Frank McGuinness, at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre), the objects onstage are also triangulated and foreshadow the interaction to come. Two tattered Louis XV chairs are placed at a long, decrepit table—the table, one assumes, at which Agamemnon feasted before he was murdered upon his return from Troy. It is propped up on the remnant of an Ionic column and rests on a stage floor entirely covered with brown earth. This startling visual effect, borrowed from Peter Brook's "The Ik" (1975), literally "grounds" the play's fierce emotions. The upstage wall, which forms the exterior of the palace, is a mixture of old brick and modern concrete. When Electra (the superb Zoë Wanamaker) first appears, wedged in an alcove halfway up the wall, she wears the ancient mask of tragedy; she descends to earth and takes off the mask to show us the modern face of torment.

Wanamaker's voice has a rounded, husky timbre that compounds the voltage of her fury. Wrapped in a frayed, capacious brown tweed overcoat, which weighs her down like the grief she shoulders (the suggestion is that the coat is her father's), she appears to be all head and mouth—a mouth that makes a straight line across her tortured, pug-nosed face. Her black hair is spiked. She picks over her losses like the bloody scabs on her scalp. "Hear my pain," she prays to the gods in her first stage breath; her every word is a megaphone for sorrow. Electra, who mourns the murder of her father, Agamemnon, by her hated mother, Clytemnestra, and her mother's lover, Aegisthus (now a cruel and wasteful king), is a kind of typhoon of inconsolable feeling. "Will you not rest from it, when it will bring you no remedy?" says the chorus (Pat Carroll), in the voice of ordinary life confronting the extraordinary. "It is pointless—why do you persist?" But Electra is demented; she can't stop. "Forgive me, I have to do it, I have to," she says. Electra is in the avant-garde of suffering: anguish is both her identity and her mission. "I have a job to do / And that is to weep sore tears over my dead father," she says. By keeping her pain fresh, Electra keeps her dead father alive.

In the avant-garde of suffering: Zoë Wanamaker as the theatre's original grieving daughter. Photograph by Max Vadukul.

Electra's unrelenting operatic lamentations give her a sense of power; she will not shut up. Her sister Chrysothemis (Marin Hinkle) tells her to watch her mouth or she'll be "eaten without salt"; her mother reminds her, "If you had always spoken so civilly, I would have listened more to you"; Aegisthus is threatening to put her in solitary confinement; even her exiled brother, Orestes (Michael Cumpsty), who she first thinks is dead but who returns to avenge their father's death, politely tells her to cool it. "I don't want to limit your happiness," he says when they are finally reunited. "But it's too great— / You're frightening me." Her sound refuses communication; it is a wall of words that won't let others in.

Indeed, the two best scenes in the production come when Electra suddenly falls silent. In the

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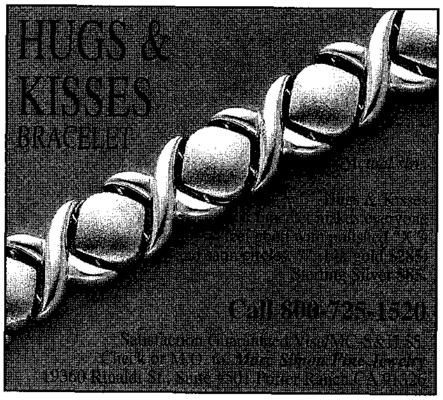

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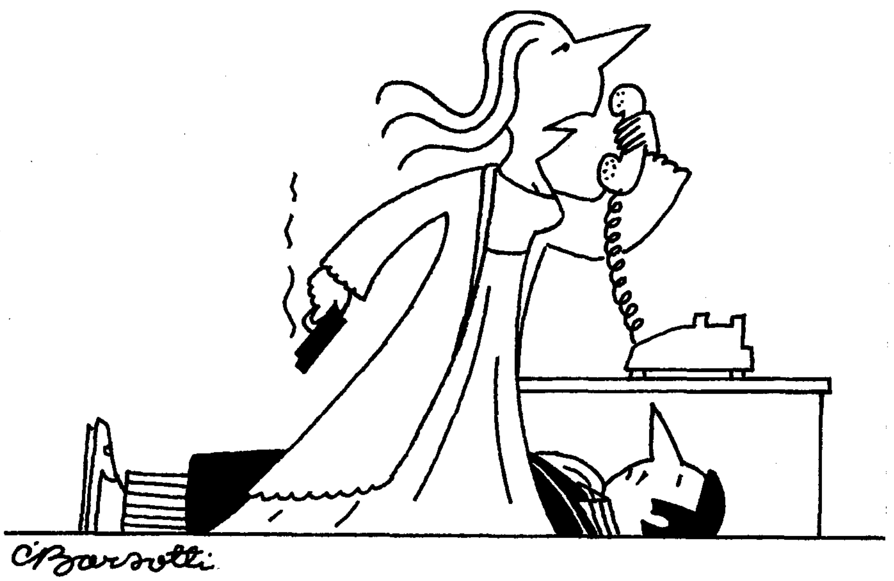

"I want to report a dénouement."

first, she sits petulantly staring into space as her mother finally has her say. Claire Bloom, a commanding and beautiful Clytemnestra in her red dress and shawl, is a stunning foil for Wanamaker. Clytemnestra is a tough cookie, and she has a case. "I am not a cruel woman," she says. "But I do abuse you because you abuse me so often. /And your excuse is your father, nothing else. / I killed him." She goes on, "He killed my daughter—why should he not die?" This great speech raises for the first time in the audience's mind the stark fact that Agamemnon sacrificed Electra's sister Iphigenia to get to Troy. Electra may not listen, but the audience does. We are caught up in the eternal ambiguous impasse between parent and child—the discussion of who did what to whom, which echoes down the ages. In the second powerful silence, as Orestes goes into the house to fulfill his filial destiny Electra is lifted in the arms of the beloved family retainer (the compelling Stephen Spinella), who took Orestes into exile as a child. For a split second, Electra, safe for the first time in his fatherly embrace, drops into a dead sleep, in what amounts to the play's only moment of grace.

Lunatics are melodramatic: when Orestes finally emerges from the house after dispatching their mother, Electra licks blood from his outstretched hands. This is one of several huge, shrewdly staged moments; Leveaux's exciting theatrical intelligence seems to have abandoned him only in the area of casting, where the production has a split personality. First-division English players—Bloom and Wanamaker—are thrown together with somewhat lacklustre second-division American ones. The imbalance takes a bit of the shine off an otherwise terrific evening, but doesn't spoil it. The play's bewildering brutality comes through as clearly as yesterday's headlines.

INJUSTICE of another sort is the subject of "Parade," a new musical co-conceived and directed by Hal Prince, with a book by Alfred Uhry and lyrics and music by Jason Robert Brown. The show, at the Vivian Beaumont, revisits the case of Leo Frank, a college-educated Northern Jew who in 1913 was accused of murdering a teen-age girl in the Atlanta pencil factory that he managed, only to be taken from jail in 1915 by anti-Semitic vigilantes and lynched. It is generally believed that Frank, a buttoned-down soul who barely spoke in his own defense, was railroaded, and for the entire first act—twenty-one songs—"Parade" feels like a train hauling a heavy cargo of exposition uphill to a preset destination. In the second act, when Lucille Frank's fight to save her husband's life turns a stale arranged marriage into a love match, the musical picks up some steam. The ride is never quite exhilarating, but it has its heady moments.

The show is framed by a Confederate memorial parade—a spectacle meant to conjure the volatile Southern atmosphere that will lead to Frank's scapegoating. In Prince's slick staging, the parade passes upstage behind the heads of a row of spectators as if we were at the back of the crowd; we glimpse only the tops of instruments, the waving Confederate flags, the caps of passing soldiers, the occasional tossed baton. What is meant as a metaphor for the musical turns out to be an augury of the production, which doesn't get close to the issues of anti-Semitism, tabloid rabble-rousing, and the spirit of collective Southern revenge, all of which it strains to see but perceives only vaguely. Even the lyrics occasionally have trouble staying properly focussed. In "How Can I Call This Home?," which sets out Frank's uncomfortable accommodation to the South and to his Southern wife, he concludes:

> Well, I'm sorry, Lucille,
> But I feel what I feel
> And this place is surreal.

Surrealism was a nineteen-twenties phenomenon; this is 1913.

The show comes to life almost every time it veers from the grim, inevitable trajectory of Frank's public story. For instance, in the fantasy "Come Up to My Office," Frank (the expert Brent Carver) breaks into dance and briefly becomes the Big Bad Wolf whom the factory girls describe in their disputed testimony at the kangaroo-court proceedings. "Just take a break and swing by, honey," Carver sings, gliding amusingly between the girls. "No one has to know but me and you / That you came, that you came, that you came, that you came . . ." That moment, which occurs in the middle of Act I, is the first to win the audience's applause and is also the brightest spot for the choreographer, Patricia Birch, whose work otherwise lapses into the generic. The black voices in "Parade"—especially the gritty bass of Ray Aranha and the fine blues baritone of Rufus Bonds, Jr.—are outstanding and give the show a jolt of energy and irony. The best numbers are a chain-gang blues, "Feel the Rain Fall," which is wailed powerfully by Bonds, and "A Rumblin' and a Rollin'," where Aranha and Bonds are joined by J. C. Montgomery and Brooke Sunny Moriber in a terrific belowstairs meditation on the Northern hullabaloo about Frank's plight:

> They comin', they comin' now, yessirree!
> 'Cause a white man gonna get hung, you see.
> There's a black man swingin' in ev'ry tree
> But they don't never pay attention! . . .
> They never say, "Why? Why? Why?"
> But if a Yankee boy flies . . .
> Surprise! Surprise! Surprise!

In musicals, love usually finds a way. Here, at the finale, as Lucille (the big-voiced Carolee Carmello) is joined by her husband in a windy but effective duet, "All the Wasted Time," love arrives too late to save the show. The hard work that went into "Parade" is transparent, but in the theatre it's originality, not earnestness, that wins the day.

As the world knows, the film star Nicole Kidman is in a play—David Hare's "freely adapted" version of Arthur Schnitzler's sexual Viennese merry-go-round "La Ronde" (1900), whose ten dialogues have been remarketed in a down-and-dirty package as "The Blue Room," at the Cort. Kidman is beautiful, leggy, and damn good at her job. She and her excellent co-star, Iain Glen, have real chemistry, and, indeed, it takes all their charisma to give the cardboard characters and the charmless script here an iota of life. Together, they act out a series of sad seductions, with Kidman being rogered every which way, including up; the duration of each sexual bout is flashed on the back wall, as though it were a scoreboard. It's a vulgar touch—one in keeping with the winded sensationalism of Sam Mendes's production, which would make voyeurs of us all. Hare has followed Schnitzler's game plan, so the shallowness of the characters is not entirely his fault; his contribution is the brittle dialogue, which makes the play all the more insufferable. An eighteen-nineties sense of sin has been replaced by a nineteen-nineties sense of cynicism. There's nothing erotic here, and even the news of Ms. Kidman's nudity has been greatly exaggerated: what we get is a brief sighting of her backside and a bit of breast, barely visible in the dim stage light. The ballyhoo surrounding "The Blue Room" has sold out its limited engagement—a case, it seems to me, of making a Mound of Venus out of a molehill. ♦

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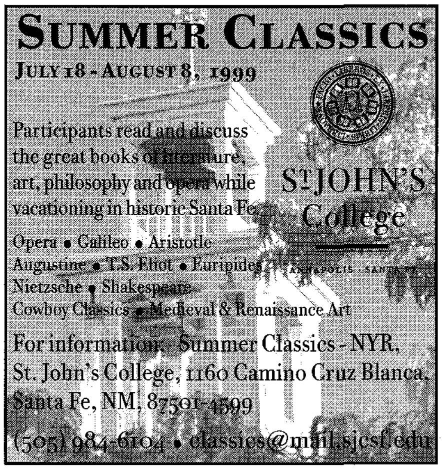
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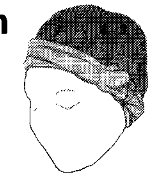
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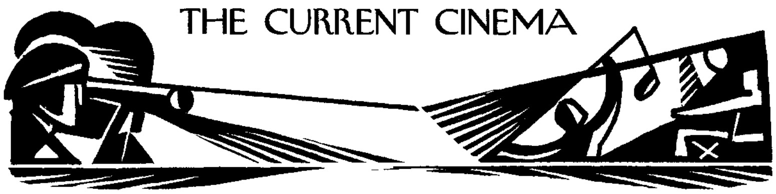


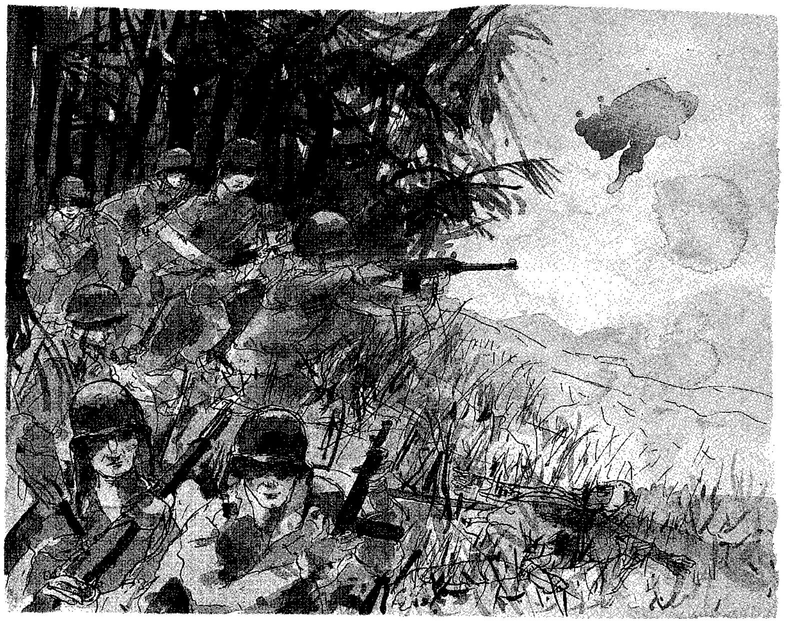
DOING BATTLE

Terrence Malick's return, and the season's stocking stuffers.

BY ANTHONY LANE

IT has been twenty years since Terrence Malick last honored us, or beguiled us, with a movie. "Badlands" came out in 1973, "Days of Heaven" in 1978, and that was it: Malick went to ground, and the rumor industry, which loves a no-show, went to town. Now the man is back, bringing neither a masterpiece nor a catastrophe but something so ravishingly strange that only he could have made it.

"The Thin Red Line" is adapted from James Jones's novel of that name, although, as you listen to the moony monologues that resound through nearly three hours of film, you could be forgiven for thinking that when Malick sat down to write the screenplay he slapped a copy of Emerson on top of the Jones. "What's keeping us from reaching out, touching the glory?" one character muses toward the end. What's keeping him is the small matter of Guadalcanal: the picture centers on an Army Rifle company that runs ashore, fights its way up a green hill, takes out a village, rests up, and leaves. Comparisons will inevitably be made with "Saving Private Ryan," but in truth the battlegrounds are barely on the same planet: Spielberg's men drive forward not just on a particular mission but in pursuit of a greater good, whereas Malick turns soldiers into wanderers. The seem to have drifted into the service o a random destiny, and they leave the island with the air of men who have give their all to a near-nothing. "The Thi Red Line" is scarcely a war movie, because there is no Second World War t be seen—just the quick chill of deat and patches of sun-warmed fatigue



Wandering through the ominous, clear-gold light of "The Thin Red Line."

Malick's climate control, in fact seems more coherent than his grasp o character. D Day, as Spielberg reminde us, lurched into life on nauseating seas but there is something far more ominous in the low, clear-gold light tha gilds the ships near the start of "Th Thin Red Line," and the velvety swell o water at their bows. This illusion o blessedness stays with the men as the storm the beaches and find nothing but lustrous, travel-brochure sand. They are here to clobber the Japs, and the Japs refuse to play. Malick stretches the suspense for as long as he dares, sending his camera out to prowl at grass-top level and to stare at the local wildlife, which, for the remainder of the movie, stares right back. (To signal the Japanese presence with a shot of upside-down fruit bats is not, shall we say, the most diplomatic use of montage in the history of cinema.) At last, the company comes under fire from the top of the slope, and we in turn have to duck in our seats beneath a barrage of dramatis personae. Who are these people? Their names are sawed-off single syllables: Fife (Adrien Brody), Welsh (Sean Penn), Witt (Jim Caviezel), Bell (Ben Chaplin), Gaff (John Cusack), Keck (Woody Harrelson), Storm (John C. Reilly), and Tall (Nick Nolte).

There are tremendous actors in that long list, but some of them have to carve a character out of nothing more than a set-piece speech and a couple of smokes. Cusack, looking wise and seasoned with grime, pops up out of nowhere, leads a thrilling assault on the bunker, and then disappears; Nolte, as his superior officer, confides that he views him as a son, but we see no evidence of their relationship. John Savage staggers around in full crack-up mode, reinforcing our embarrassed sense that we are watching a preëmptive Vietnam film, and there are meaningless cameos for George Clooney and John Travolta, the latter sensibly taking cover behind a ridge of mustache.

You could argue, of course, that the movie's lack of a core—of a single soldier whom we can hook up with—is true to the chaos of the occasion, and that the lopsided narrative (the frontal attack is followed by an hour of cleanup operations and hanging around) reflects the rhythms of wartime soldiering, with its tedium pockmarked by panic. But "The Thin Red Line" is an infuriating film, which keeps grabbing and then brushing off your interest. There are signs that Malick genuinely wanted to engage our sympathies; Private Bell, for instance, is a fine part for Chaplin, who is fuller of face these days, with a heavy sadness about him. The pastoral flashbacks that besiege him—summer foreplay with his wife back home—are both a nod to devotees of "Days of Heaven" and, in some weirdly believable way, the reason for his lunatic bravery on the hill. Bell tells his beloved that if he dies, "I'll wait for you, on the other side of the dark waters." Like the best of Malick, this stirring line is an inch short of pretentious; it deals in what you might call the Homeric demotic, and who else has the nerve to conjure that?

Needless to say, Bell speaks the words inside his head. Malick has always had a fondness for voice-over, but while Sissy Spacek's ruminations in "Badlands" struck you with their scary moral numbness, the ramblings in "The Thin Red Line" offer the more undisciplined suggestion of a trip. What a gonzo world the movie constructs: intense physicality on the battlefield, helpless poetry on the brain, and nothing in between. (Even Nick Nolte's bellowing rants to the troops sound like messages to himself.) The trigger for these yearnings is the opening sequence, in which Witt and a fellow-grunt, who have gone AWOL, sport with the native Melanesians. The boys among whom they gambol in the waves have amazing orange hair, like miniature Dennis Rodmans, but Witt sees in them the promise of earthly peace; by the end, to no one's surprise, they have grown fretful and pustular. "Look at the things you have made," we are told, and the plaintive accusation confirms that we have been watching the world's first Rousseauist combat movie. It is only incidentally concerned with America versus Japan: Malick directs us instead to the wrestling of man with man, and to the irredeemable spoliation of virgin hearts and skins. You may not buy that vision, and if I were a veteran of Guadalcanal I would be tempted to take it as an insult. But, a week after seeing "The Thin Red Line," I am starting to be spooked by it, and already I need to see it again.

IN "You've Got Mail," Tom Hanks plays Joe Fox, a mean bastard who wrecks other people's livelihoods. Yeah, right. The film, which was directed by Nora Ephron, never gives Hanks the chance to see if he *can* stretch to meanness; in fact, it gives him outrageously little to do, and there is delight and relief in his rubbery face when he finally gets to unleash a little comic business with a bag of pretzels. Most of his time is spent behind the flap of a laptop; Joe's secret, which he keeps from his

Then the Lord answered Job out of the Whirlwind

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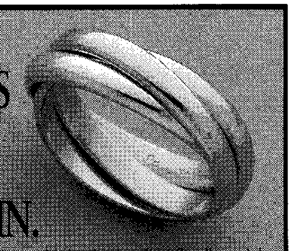

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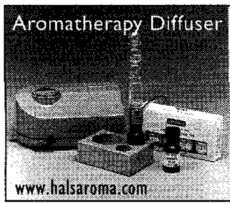

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spiky girlfriend (Parker Posey), is that he has an E-mail thing going with Kathleen Kelly (Meg Ryan), who in turn keeps it from her wise-ass boyfriend, Frank (Greg Kinnear). Why Joe and Kathleen feel guilty is beyond me, since they barely even dally; instead, they write things like "Do you ever feel you have become the worst version of yourself?" This sounds like no E-mail ever written; the only thing the new medium is good for, apart from the transferral of wrong information, is the long-distance equivalent of playing footsie under the table.

Both Joe and Kathleen correspond under a pseudonym, or *nom de souris*, as we must learn to call it; the hook of the plot is that when they meet they hate each other, in that daffy pre-love way. He runs a chain of bookstores called Fox Books—the kind of emporium where you order a cappuccino next to the fiction section, carefully leave a ring of mocha froth on the flyleaf of the new Alice Walker, and then replace it for the benefit of the next customer. Around the corner from Joe's new store is Kathleen's little bookshop, called The Shop Around the Corner. This is a cunning reference to the fact that "You've Got Mail" is a nineties rehash of Ernst Lubitsch's "The Shop Around the Corner"; anyone expecting the Lubitsch touch, however, will have to make do with the Ephron sag. Lubitsch would have hired Ephron as a writer, no question, but her direction looks slack and graceless, and he would certainly have frowned on her tendency, whenever the plot pauses for breath, to elbow it onward by means of easy-listening standards on the soundtrack. The movie makes for smooth viewing, but so smeared is the romantic tension that when Kathleen eventually discovers the truth she blurts out, "I wanted it to be you!" And guess what: it is!

"Stepmom" tries a little harder, but not much. The director, Chris Columbus, has corralled a sturdy cast: Luke (Ed Harris) leaves Jackie (Susan Sarandon) and takes up with Isabel (Julia Roberts), and the kids get caught in the middle. The script resembles a lightly dramatized "Dear Abby" column: "When you get older, your relationships get a lot more complicated." According to the credits, it took *five* people to write this stuff; one of them was Ron Bass, who was recently man enough to put his name to the screenplay of "What Dreams May Come," and I thought that I detected his expert hand in some of the snivelly bits. It would have been a good idea if the interested parties had decided what genre of film they were creating—whether "Stepmom" should be a divorce drama or a death flick. The trailers have been unambiguous: they suggest a buzzing parental comedy and make absolutely no mention of the fact that Jackie spends the latter half of the movie succumbing to cancer. The huge, staring closeups that allow Julia Roberts to look ravishing in black sweaters and dinky knit hats are gradually turned upon Sarandon's wintry pallor and bloodshot eyes.

"Stepmom" is a sad tale, and I went equipped with a mille-feuille of Kleenex, but it doesn't push the buttons as it should. Compare it to Sarandon's last major weepie, "Dead Man Walking," and you realize that Columbus is drained of confidence by the onset of strong emotions; the more gulpy the scene, the longer and slower he plays it, as if to double-check that we will be ensnared. And to think this is the guy who wrote "Gremlins." Some enterprising theatre owner should release it on a double bill with "You've Got Mail": both feature women with high-powered yet expendable careers, and both fight shy of sex as anything but a footnote to love. The fact that both will make tons of money is less interesting than the millions floating around onscreen. When Joe Fox and his father break up with their respective women, they both take refuge on private yachts; Luke's Manhattan kitchen is straight out of *House Beautiful*, which tends to signify Movie Bad; and you can't help feeling that Jackie's pain is eased (not for her, I hasten to add, but for us) by the consoling environment of her immaculate house in the woods. This is pure Clintonite cinema: generous helpings of red-blooded, Reagan-era luxury with a *jus* of delicately strained feelings ladled over the top. Can you impeach a movie?

"The power is real. The story is forever. The time is now."—Billboard slogan for "The Prince of Egypt."

THE time is then. The place is Egypt. The boy is born. The prognostication is dodgy. The answer is bulrushes. The boy is launched. The boy is found. The adoption process is unimpeded by interference from government agencies. The dad is Pharaoh. The brother is Rameses. The stage is set.

The time is later. The kid is a hunk. The kid is a *prince*. The chariot-racing is extreme. The traffic is nonexistent. The living is easy. The problem is conscience. The workforce is enslaved. The suffering is Jewish. The prince is twitchy. The answer is Get Out Now. The desert is deserted. The tribe is welcoming. The prince is at peace. The prince is home. The chick is Tzipporah. The flirting is hot. The sex is not. (The studio is DreamWorks.) The day is dawning. The bush is burning. The bush is *talking*. ("I am what I am." The bush is *Popeye*?) The message is clear. The stage is set.

The prince is back. The Pharaoh is Rameses. The rivalry is non-friendly. The deadlock is grim. The answer is plagues. The Almighty is mad as hell, and he's not going to take it anymore. The attack is frog-based. The river is blood. The wind is death. Frankly, the place is a mess. The Pharaoh is crumpled. The prince is tops, and the People is Let Go! The chase is on. The Pharaoh is closing. The sea is in the way. Correction: the sea is not in the way. The sea is, like, whoompa-*whoosh*. The enemy is swamped. The Jews is through.

The picture is O.K. The picture is *fine*. The cast is packed. The prince is Kilmer. The brother is Fiennes. The squeeze is Pfeiffer. (The dance is hubba-hubba.) The trouble is scale. The trouble is bombast. The predecessor is De Mille. The mood is tumescent. The music is nuts. Look. The thing is this. The cutting-edge computer-generated imagery is white-hot new. The movie is old-fashioned. The story is forever. The movie is for the holidays. The choice is yours. ♦

THE NEW YORKER (ISSN 0028-792X), published weekly (except for seven combined issues: Feb. 23 & Mar. 2, Apr. 27 & May 4, June 22 & 29, Aug. 24 & 31, Oct. 26 & Nov. 2, Dec. 7 & 14, Dec. 28 & Jan. 4) by The New Yorker Magazine, Inc., 20 W. 43rd St., N.Y., N.Y. 10036. Vol. LXXIV, No. 40, December 28, 1998 & January 4, 1999. Periodical postage paid at New York, N.Y., and at additional mailing offices. Authorized as second-class mail by the Post Office Department, Ottawa, Canada, and for payment of postage in cash. Canadian Publication Mail Sales Product Agreement No.190969. Canadian goods-and-services-tax registration number R123242885. Registered as a newspaper at the British Post Office. Subscription rates: In U.S. and possessions, one year, $39.95; two years, $72.00. In Canada, one year, $83.00 (includes GST and HST where applicable). In Germany, one year, DM290. Mail orders to: IP Internationale Presse, Distribution & Marketing GmbH, Waldstr. 70, D-63128 Dietzenbach, Germany. Other foreign subscriptions, one year, $91.00, payable in advance.

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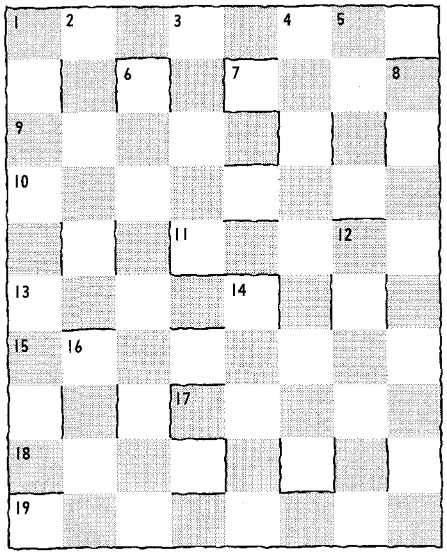

ACROSS

1 Reclusive author, 51, harbored by birth-control advocate (8)
7 Put a heavy burden on one cab (4)
9 Body of water tossed canoe (5)
10 Spare altimeter shows actual duration (4,4)
11 The whole world's lacking good places to put earrings (5)
13 Fortune-teller has finally hosted religious feast (5)
15 Regan's sister oiled car sloppily (8)
17 Interior designer's head is in fog (5)
18 Danger—rook is in front of king (4)
19 Cheers Hans' son, a radical (8)

DOWN

1 Mark lies about places to unload a Maserati, for example (6,3)
2 Upwardly mobile Decca and EMI at first give in (6)
3 Finally getting rid of the beginning and ending entirely (2,3)
4 Most of profit split by vulgar Italian patriot (9)
5 Former morning test (4)
6 Cut first part of the speech "Ritual Symbolic Wear in Tribal Life" (9)
8 See a stick beat hockey player's equipment (3,6)
12 Sheila could become a man (6)
14 Rule check is heard (5)
16 State "What's this!," keeping interest (4)

• •

The solution to puzzle No. 70 appears on page 63. For a free copy of "The New Yorker's Guide to Solving Cryptic Crosswords," please send your fax number or a stamped, self-addressed envelope to "Solvers' Guide," The New Yorker, 20 West 43rd Street, New York, N.Y. 10036. For an electronic version, send an E-mail to puzzleguide@newyorker.com.

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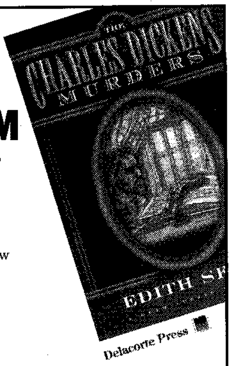

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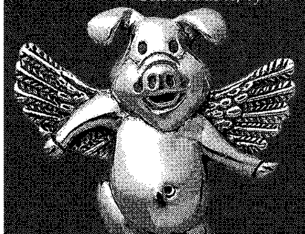

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GREETINGS, FRIENDS!

BY ROGER ANGELL

DEAR hearts and friends, huzzah, well met,
Regathered from the Internet;
God bless you each, wherever reachable,
And keep you hale and unimpeachable.
Pals, note this page, this poet's cottage,
Freshly wreathed with major wattage:
Blazing waits in neon raiment
Grace our rooftop infotainment;
Plus yon Magi, in depiction,
Testing Con Ed's pow'rs of fiction,
Draining volts from here to Yonkers,
Driving all the neighbors bonkers—
Well, never mind: for anodyne
We'll let our softer thoughts incline
Toward Sen. John Glenn, the senior flier,
Judi Dench, and Danny Meyer,
Not forgetting folks to thank
Like Paul O'Neill and Barney Frank.
Or to append a hug or two
For Hedda Sterne and Harry Wu.
Or clap the shoulder, man to man,
Of Daniel Patrick Moynihan.
I wish a most agreeable Yule
To Wyclef Jean, Fintan O'Toole,
Kofi Annan, Anne-Sophie Mutter,
Tony Judt, and Justice Souter;
Nor ask less by a scintilla
For Prince Chas. and his Camilla,
Cameron Diaz, Peter Gomes,
Peter Gammons, and Puffy Combs.
Now gather, gang, and sound a paean—
Fans of life or fans Wrigleyan,
Butcher, baker, cook, or grosa—
Happy Christmas, Sammy Sosa!
Say, David Wells and Two Fat Ladies,
Step aboard my stretch Mercedes
And we'll go mail by Special Handling
Warm thoughts to Seal and Garry Shandling;
And, playing Santa, stuff the socks
Of Chuck Schumer and Michael J. Fox;
And drop off puppies, by comparison,
Chez Darryl Straw and Daisy Garrison.
Renée Fleming! Adam Clymer!
Cheers from this endemic rhymer.
Ho, Sam Raimi, Samuel Ramey;
Yo, John Irving—you, too, Amy!
Bon Noël, Zinedine Zidane,
Pascale van Kipnis, Wu-Tang Clan;
What say, José Saramago;
You Bulls still idle in Chicago:
We hail you all and wish you well
In this reissue of Nowell.
Now, Sister Wendy, come with me
And we'll go sit on Santa's knee,
Joining in a jolly dandle
With Frieda Hughes and Tony Randall,
While Venus Williams finds a lap
Between Mark Green and Gordon Clapp,
Deepening this steamy drama
With Ginger Spice, Simon Schama,
Tori Amos, Cammi Granato,
And, yes, I guess, ol' Al D'Amato.
Ye feathered seraphim, deploy
Fit songs for Arundhati Roy,
And hit selections from on high
For Frances Bean and Evan Bayh,
Plus strains of Bach or Boccherini
For Frank McCourt and Clare Rossini.
Boy choirs, come on!—we count on you,
And Robin Cook and Bob Giroux,
With libretti con amore
For Tipper Gore and skipper Torre,
Chamique Holdsclaw, Dominique Swain,
Sharon Olds, and Shania Twain.
Come New Year's, dears, we'll all be chillin'
With Sharon Stone and Jakob Dylan:
With smiling faces 'round the table
Let's slurp up all the Mumm's we're able,
Growing inly far less nerdy
(More like Vinny Testaverde);
Then gath'ring near the gleaming tree
We'll search out *intime* company
Like Lauren Holly, Ian McKellen,
Iggy Pop, and Polly Mellen.
As midnight bongs, we'll boogie down
With Tony Blair and Tina Brown;
Jeff Van Gundy, Webster Slaughter,
Chelsea Clinton (well-known daughter);
P. D. James, J. D. McClatchy,
David Salle; Itchy, Scratchy;
The Bros. Bush, the babies Hanson;
Adam Moss, and Marilyn Manson!

OUR muse is stuck; more luck next time
To those with names we couldn't rhyme.
Felicitations, everyone,
This woeful year is nearly done;
Pray this gentle season lend a
Sense of calm to your agenda,
And may our inmost selves aspire
To higher things, like Mark McGwire!

ARNIE LEVIN

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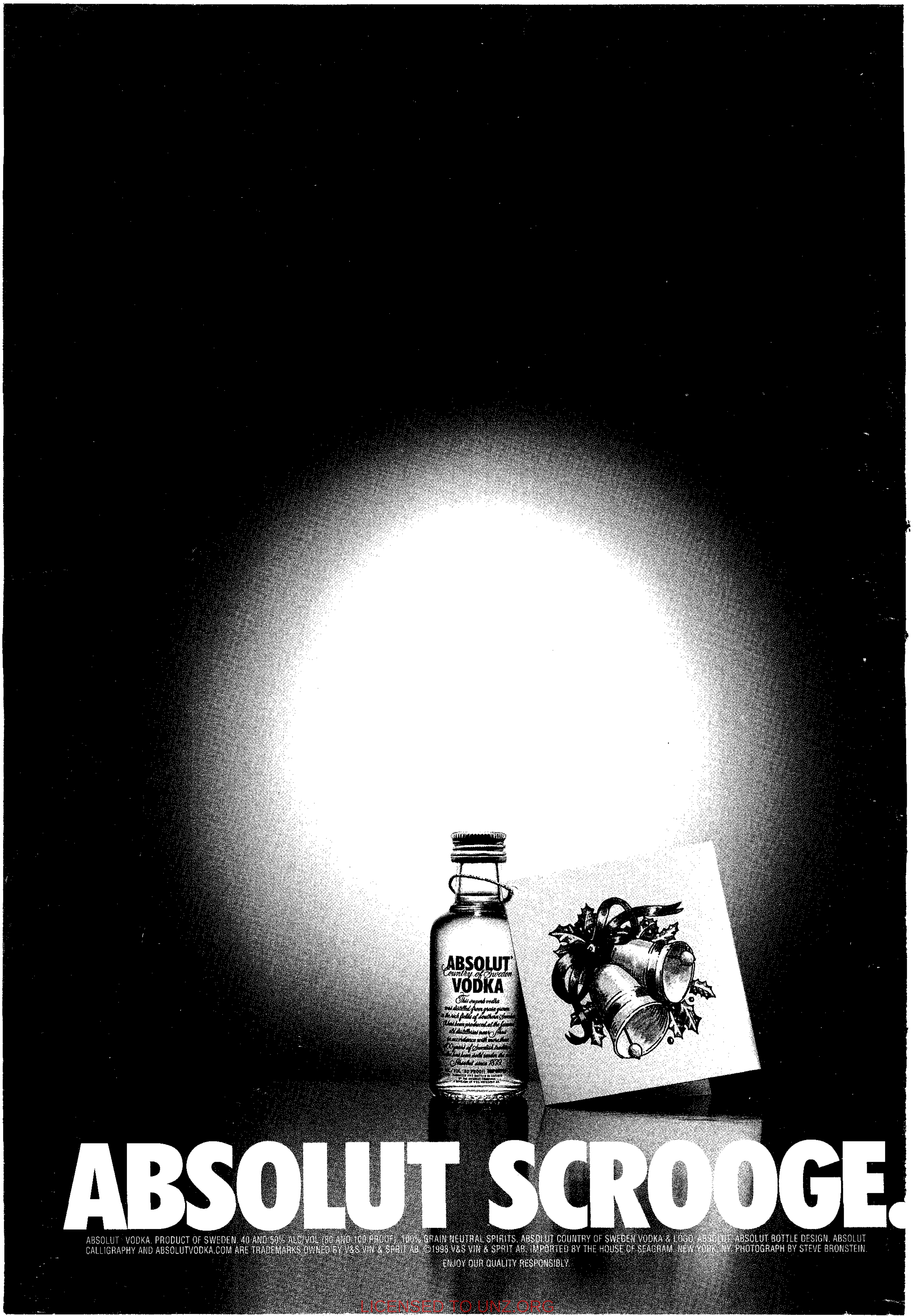
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